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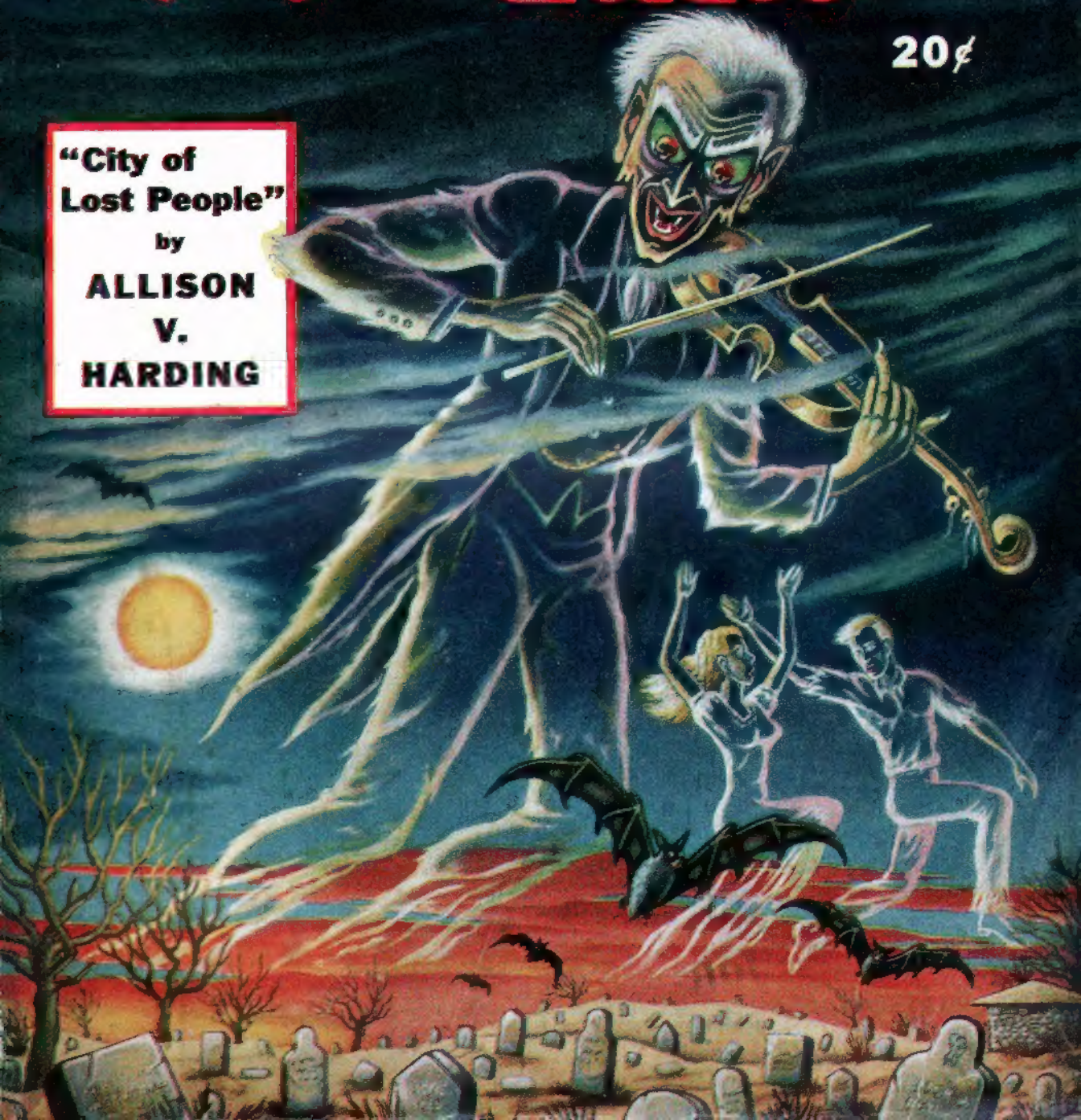
"City of Lost People"
by
ALLISON V. HARDING



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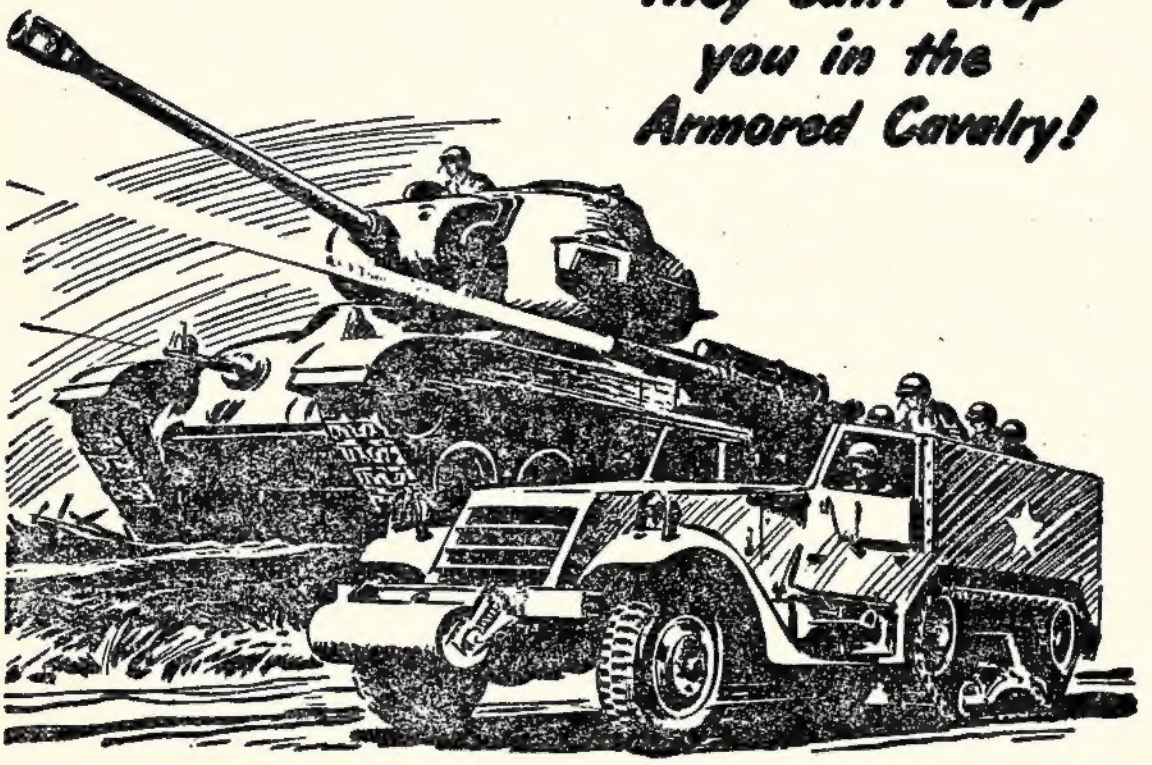

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City of Lost People

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

EDGAR CHADBOURNE laid the last of his office work aside, tidied his small desk and rose in the empty office to put on his coat. It was not the first time he had worked late, well past the time when the others went streaking to their five o'clock buses and subways and trains.

But these things happened to Chadbourne. He was a man more worthy than the humble job he held, and there always seemed to be some office overflow toward the end of the day that inevitably spilled onto his desk, and inevitably he would be sitting there while some of the other assistants went whooping out the door calling back, "You don't mind, Edgar, old boy! It'll keep you out of mischief!"

Edgar was a medium-sized, usual-featured individual, undiscovered in most any crowd, lonely and unsociable because of shyness, but far from stupid. He knew the little office joke about "Workhorse" Chadbourne and "He's a good man to help me make my 5:10 train." It was just that he didn't mind.

He was single, in his middle thirties. All he had in the way of relatives and family were three or four states across the country. He had nothing much to go home to but a furnished room in a walk-up brownstone, and his books. So it was neither a new nor distasteful experience for him to be carefully putting the last lights of the office out, thumbing the door closed behind him, feeling that it was locked and ringing the elevator bell on a now totally empty floor.

And as it did each night, all of his problems fell away from his mind and he thought instead about the interesting psychology book that he was reading. The subject was one of his favorites.

The elevator came then. Chadbourne turned suddenly, feeling the pain in his knee, still cranky after that heavy fall a month ago. He stepped aboard the empty car, preoccupied with his own thoughts. The lobby of the Becker Tower was deserted. Even the elevator starter seemed to have strolled off, perhaps for a cup of coffee. Edgar noted the time automatically on the large wall dial. It was six twenty-five.

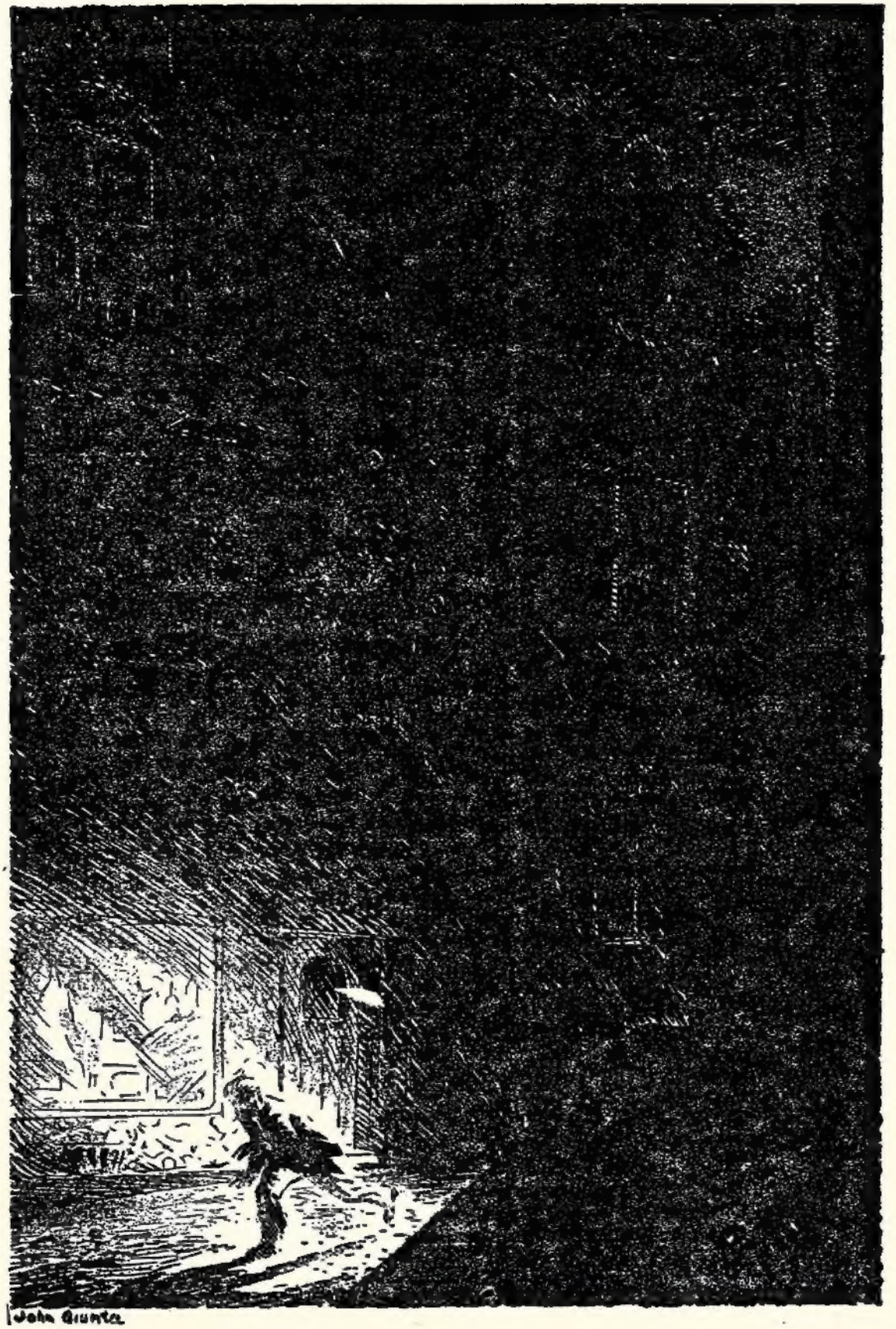
He went through the revolving door into the street, and the cold winter air hit him with an impact. His steps automatically took the right direction. His mind was still taken up with the book he'd been reading. He was a block and a half from the Becker Tower before he noticed it. First he was merely curious. Then with a growing wonder as he looked around and every which way. Another half block and he'd reached Main Avenue, one of the big city thoroughfares, and then he stopped completely.

AT THIS hour it was possible but not probable that the street in front of the Becker Tower would be empty. But Main Avenue! Yet instead of the busy, bustling throngs that usually packed the sidewalks so that you had to thread your way carefully through them, there was tonight . . . *no one! No one as far as his eyes could see.*

Edgar crossed with the light and walked two blocks further along the avenue. At a corner he came upon a long, red bus. It

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

Have you ever walked into the streets at rush hour and found no one . . . . no one, abroad?


John Gunta

was lighted, but quite empty. Unconsciously he quickened the tempo of his steps, and for the first time he noticed the loud sound his heels made as they came down on the pavements. Why, he'd walked on Main Avenue at midnight and in the small hours of the morning, and always . . . always there were at least a few people!

The stores with their garish front-lighting bordered the right of way. The street lights blazed with their double sockets and the traffic signals turned red and green and red and green again with their usual precision. It was then that the curiousness and wonderment were joined by a new feeling. What if . . . what if something catastrophic had happened! His mind raced at full-time, breakneck speed.

He had been in his office almost an hour and a half after the others had left. Suppose—he was not at all sure just what had occurred. He wondered wildly at the possibilities of atomic action by some enemy force. Gas perhaps, but he smelled nothing. The night air was clean and cold.

His palms and forehead were moist despite the chilliness of the air, and Chadbourne's strides were just short of a run. He came upon his customary news dealer. There was the brown-painted shack, the not-so-neat rows of innumerable magazines vying for public interest, and the frontespiece of the shack flat and open with its three or four evening papers—and he came closer and looked; they were the late-evening editions laid out in rows, a piece of clothesline with a weight at the end across them to keep them from blowing and a handful of pennies and nickels left by hurried purchasers as they reached, grabbed and ran.

But Nick, the old paper-seller who'd just had a piece on himself in the Sunday supplement for having been on this very corner for forty-two years—Nick was gone!

Chadbourne hurried on. He turned off Main Avenue, and on the side streets passed several fashionable restaurants usually flush with people at this hour, but their brightly colored glass-paneled doors stood immobile, and once when he stepped close to peer inside at one softly lighted barroom, he saw it was empty, the regimented stools uninhabited.

Next Chadbourne found himself running. It was a delusion, he told himself, but the more he tried to reason, the harder he ran as though by so doing he would finally catch up with the others, be among them again. There must be a logical explanation for all this. His pounding heart and rapid breathing finally slowed him to a fast walk again.

HE PASSED the el structure, looked up the stairs that led to the money-changers' booth. The booth was lit, he could see from here. He could also tell it was empty. He went on, and each new sight turned his stomach into a tighter knot, beat his pounding heart into even greater efforts.

Here was his own block with the barber shop on the corner. Ah! Its striped electrical pole was working! He came abreast of the brightly lighted window and looked in. There were the three chairs, the shelf of varied-colored bottles of pomades and tonics; the bootblack's stool and the table of last month's magazines. But no one! No one at all!

Edgar fumbled for his key as he broke into a run again. His brownstone was here. It took him three trys to get the door open. He fell inside. He stopped then for a moment inside the door as though here would be some partial sanctuary against this thing he did not understand. He had three flights to go to his top-floor apartment, but Chadbourne had to rest.

And then he noticed something else. The ground-floor door opened past the apartment of a seamstress, and as he came in nights, he'd never failed to hear the whirring of her electric sewing machine. Never . . . never, that is before tonight, for inside here, it was even quieter than the great outdoors he'd just fled from, and he felt the quiet all around like a blanket as he mounted the stairs.

No Joplin kids whooping and being shushed by their mother on the second-floor-back. No hesitant saxophone player in the front trying to keep on key and off the nerves of the other rooms all at once.

Chadbourne's own and top floor was quiet anyway and that was a little less strange than all the other things that had happened, for it was always still here. He, Edgar, made little noise, and the doctor

who occupied the front was likewise no noisemaker.

He let himself into his back room-and-a-half, sat down on the bed and held his head in trembling hands. The room was its customary prosaic self, and that served to make him feel somewhat better. "I've got to hold onto myself," Edgar repeated over and over in his mind. He laughed shakily, sat up, and then stretched out full length. Perhaps a nap would help. This experience had an explanation! Of that he was sure. It had something to do with his fall!

He remembered that night over four weeks ago well. He'd stepped out in the hall, planning to go downstairs and out for a newspaper and a pack of cigarettes. The carpet on the top step was loose. He'd known and forgotten. His feet went out from under him and he pitched headlong down the long flight, coming to a shuddering stop against the wall of the second floor.

WHEN he'd opened his eyes—for he'd lost consciousness—Mrs. Joplin was holding his battered head in her lap. Her two children, for once speechless, standing wide-eyed beside him, and Dr. Kessler, the aged physician from the third-floor-front was leaning over taking his pulse with one hand and passing a small vial of vapo-aromatics under his nose.

It was certainly nice, he had thought to himself as he lay there, that there was a doctor right in the house when he took his tumble. Mrs. Bessey, the proprietoress of the building, appeared from her basement quarters, and between the three of them, they had gotten Chadbourne back up to his room and into bed.

"No," Dr. Kessler had opined. There was no necessity of calling an ambulance. Kessler was a psychiatrist, you know, and eminently qualified to take care of bumps on the head, even those resulting in a mild concussion, which was what he diagnosed this as. The only other apparent injury was a wrench of the knee.

Edgar got to know Kessler fairly well that night and the next few days. The doctor, waving away his patient's thanks, made a careful examination that evening, gave Chadbourne a sedative and left a note at bedside suggesting that the young man stop in at his room the next morning when he awoke.

Chadbourne had felt so much better on waking up the following day that he almost hesitated to knock at the front portal. But that would seem ungrateful, he reasoned. As though expecting him, the door flew open at Edgar's first rap.

"Ah, come in, my young friend!"

The room was semi-dark as though Kessler was still denying the daylight. It was musty and book-lined. There was a black medical bag on a chair in the corner, bottles here and there.

Kessler himself was a medium-sized roundish man with a gray Van Dyke. His eyes were sharp, black, and those as well as other features, nose and mouth, seemed to come together.

"I just wanted to thank you, Doctor, for taking care of me last night. I seem to feel fine this morning."

The doctor bobbed his head with what, in the gloomy room, Chadbourne took to be approval. He stepped quickly to his black bag, took out a light and a neurological hammer. He shone the light in Chadbourne's eyes, first one, then the other. Then he made Edgar sit down and tested his reflexes.

"Aha!"

"What?" Chadbourne was somewhat startled at the doctor's exclamation.

"Now, now, there's nothing bad, my young friend"—the psychiatrist put away his neurological tools—"but you did, you know, take a bad fall and that was quite a blow on the head. Now, I want you take today easy. I'm going to give you some pills. No, no, my young friend, don't protest! You don't get up and jounce about right after a head injury like that unless you want unpleasant consequences!"

Chadbourne subsided, took the pills Kessler forced on him.

"I'll stop in and see you tonight after I get back from the hospital," the physician terminated their conversation in his precise, accented voice.

Edgar had gone to the phone then and called his office, telling them about the accident, and he spent most of that day

sleeping. It was dark when he woke up, starting slightly at the sight of Kessler standing by his bed. The doctor murmured some foreign phrase and then laid a reassuring hand on Chadbourne's shoulder.

"You seem much better, young man. Get a good sleep tonight and I think you'll be able to go back to work tomorrow."

CHADBOURNE thanked the doctor again and the next day he was back at the Becker Tower. Once or twice when he would pass Kessler on the stairs or run into him in the neighborhood the doctor would ask solicitously about him, and Chadbourne always replied, "I think I'm fine."

He did remark that occasionally he felt dizzy and at other moments would get a fleeting feeling of unreality. Kessler nodded his head sagely and said that was no more than to be expected.

"After all, you know," he commented, "that was a very heavy blow on the skull!"

As Chadbourne lay in his room this night, he wondered, as one will grasp at any straw, if possibly his strange experience was not due to some transient effect of his accident. Lulled by that thought he fell asleep.

He was awakened, he knew not how long afterward, by the sound of one of Mrs. Joplin's children screaming at the other. He started up off his bed, and then the whole dreadful nightmare of that earlier evening came back to him so forcibly that he threw open the door into the hall, took several steps down toward the second flight and peered through the bannisters.

He could hear Mrs. Joplin soothing the children now, and then her door opened and one of them shot out as though from a catapult and raced down the stairs to the street floor.

Chadbourne turned, relief swelling his heart, and took the steps back up to his own landing. It was then that he noticed the black square of the opposite apartment. The door was open and framed in darkness he saw Dr. Kessler watching him. For a moment Edgar had an impulse to go over to the psychiatrist and tell him what had happened earlier, but for some reason he could not quite understand, he resisted it, waving his hands instead and returning to his own room.

He puttered around idly preparing some soup, crackers, and fruit for his late supper, for it was now, his wristwatch showed, half-past eight. He noticed suddenly as he ate, that one of the books on his bed table appeared to have been disturbed. It was open midway through the volume.

This reading matter was Kessler's. Chadbourne had more-than-the-average-layman's interest in psychology, and the physician had fairly forced several books on him. All Kessler's volumes seemed to be English translations of exotic foreign works. The open book was entitled, "Occult Factors in Psychology."

As he placed another cracker in his mouth, Edgar leaned forward and saw the paragraph marked with red pencil. Probably something Kessler had done for his own reference. His eyes took in the short paragraph.

"It is quite obvious then that the state called Life and the states called Living are intangibles, which although requiring much to disprove in terms of what are called biological entities, require far more to prove. If Mind is paramount in man, then Life is Mind, and Living a state of Mind. And all these arbitrary symbols leaving no true meaning or mark in the sands of eternity."

EDGAR CHADBOURNE read the paragraph over twice and then a third time. He did not know that he quite understood it, but there was a thought there, an enormous thought, he felt. Apparently Kessler had thought so too, to outline in red pencil.

Chadbourne wondered casually how the book had come open in that spot. It was the latest one the physician across the hall had given him. He hadn't, as yet, started it. Perhaps he'd jounced the book when he'd come into his room earlier and it had fallen open to this place. He dismissed the episode and went back to his light meal.

He was cleaning up the crumbs and running them down the small porcelain basin in the corner of his room when the light tapping came on the door. Even before he turned the knob, he knew who it was.

"Ah," said the physician, "and how are you feeling?"

"Pretty good," said Chadbourne.

"Fine! I tell you, I wanted to borrow back one of those books I loaned you. A thousand pardons, but there are some references I need."

Edgar inclined his head. "Why sure!"

Kessler's eyes flicked around the room and lit on the bedside table.

"There it is! I see you've been reading it."

The doctor stepped closer and scooped up the volume, cradling it in the crook of his elbow as if it were an only child.

"What did you think of it and that particular passage?"

"Oh, that business about Life and Living? Why I don't know that I quite understood it, Dr. Kessler."

"Ah, no. No, I dare say you didn't, my young friend." The physician laughed.

It was the first time Chadbourne had ever heard him laugh, and it was a small, unconvincing sound, brittle in the room, showing tiny yellowing teeth as the lips curled back.

The psychiatrist had turned for the door when Edgar spoke.

"Doctor, there's something I want to mention to you. I had the strangest experience of my life this evening when I left the office."

He told of what had happened, of leaving the Becker Tower, of walking out onto the street, a completely empty, desolate street, and of the trip home through lighted, lonely, city caverns, of this arrival here and the emptiness of the house terminating in his nap, and then everything was all right again.

Although the episode now, even though it was only a few hours ago, seemed as remote as a last week's nightmare, Chadbourne still wanted to hear some word of reassurance. By itself it was a shocking experience. There must . . . must be an explanation. But it was so terribly real, this unreality of loneliness, and could you . . . could you, Doctor, deceive yourself into *not seeing* people on the street, for they must have been there! It was from his fall, wasn't it? From his blow on the head and nothing of any importance? What did the doctor think?

Kessler looked at the young man for what seemed to Chadbourne like a long time. Then he said simply, "Yes, of course," and departed abruptly.

Edgar sat down. Well, he'd told a doctor. Some of these foreigners were abrupt and taciturn. That was Kessler's way of reassurance. If there'd been anything wrong, he would have said so. The "Yes, of course," was, Edgar supposed, Kessler's way of saying, "Oh, that's to be expected. That's all right!" Chadbourne dismissed the matter from his mind.

IT WAS two weeks later, in the middle of winter, that Edgar walked from the Tower one evening with Fred Jones, a coworker. They talked about this and that. Fred griped about their employer, and as they came abreast of a tobacconist's, slapped Chadbourne on the shoulder.

"Just a second, Edgar. I'm going to slip in and get myself some smokes. Be right with you."

Edgar nodded and stood at the side of the busy sidewalk watching the people pass. A pretty girl went by, making him think of Kathy at home. He tried not to think of her much. She was so intense about her music and her teaching. His own interest in her and theirs for each other had to wait. That was one of the reasons why he'd left the family and come a thousand miles here to the city.

He turned then and looked at the tobacco shop's small window with its well-planned displays of pipes and tobacco tins and smoking pouches. There were tiny lights hung by slender cords in rows of five lighting the objects. They dazzled him as he looked.

He turned away blinking, still seeing the tiny lights in his eyes, and looked at the gaily gold-colored door of the shop. He stepped forward wondering what was keeping Fred, opened the door and took two steps past the threshold.

The musical tinkle of the store's mechanism was still ringing as he stood there, his eyes sweeping the small shop. There was no one . . . no one inside! Here on the near counter was a newspaper and a carton of cigarettes. It was the evening paper that Fred had bought in the lobby of the Becker Tower folded as he folded it to

shove under his arm, and Fred's brand of smokes.

Edgar stepped further into the shop, and this time keeping his voice level, he called out, "Fred! Fred!"

No answer.

There were three counters, one on either side and another along the far or back wall. Chadbourne stepped carefully around each one, feeling with his arms. It made a part of his mind remember that picture years ago. What was it? "The Invisible Man?" But he had to make sure. He felt nothing!

The modernistic clock over the cigarette-holder display said five-fifteen. He opened the street door and went out, trying to keep the panic out of his body, trying not to notice that he was utterly alone again on one of the busiest streets in the city at the height of the evening rush hour.

He walked home and arrived there with his face damp with sweat. Again he opened the downstairs door and listened for the sounds of the seamstress, only to know and to find that there were no sounds. He climbed the stairs, and the never-quiet Joplins, as they'd once been called by Mrs. Bessey, were interred in their apartment in deathlike silence.

He made the top floor and his own room, sat on his bed, finally lay down and tried to sleep. That's what he'd done before, he remembered so well. But this time sleep would not come.

Desperately, he reached for the small, black-headed bottle Kessler had given him. There were sedatives there, and he pulled out the cotton with clumsy fingers, swallowed a white capsule from inside hurriedly.

He lay down again, and after a while, slipped into a fitful slumber. He awoke later with a start, drenched with sweat, but the only sound was the heavy beats of his own heart. His wristwatch said it was nine-thirty.

HE OPENED the door of his room and stood in the hall, looking down between the bannisters. The small, yellow bulbs of the rooming house lit the steps and the landings, but the house was silent. He went down the stairs two at a time, forgetting his fall, throwing caution to the winds. He raced into the street hatless and coatless.

Here was the barber shop . . . empty! He turned the corner and sped toward the blinking movie marquee two blocks away, his mouth moving as he read out players and the film showing. He stopped under the marquee. There was no nine-thirty line! There were no people going in. He looked in the brightly lighted ticket window. Empty! Red tickets spooled at the side waiting for purchasers who did not come.

Edgar looked at himself in a long, full-length mirror next to "Coming Attractions," and the blinking marquee as it lit up "Central Street Palace," C-E-N-T-R-A-L, and so on, the lights lighting up one by one and then all together. He looked gray and old in the mirror, and suddenly it occurred to him from things he'd read and his own imagination that he was dead and this was death!

He ran all the way back to his building, mounted the stairs to the second floor almost as fast as he'd come down a few moments before. His breath rasped in his throat and his temples pounded. His stomach was sick and he felt as if he were going to lose consciousness.

Edgar's shoulder hit the wall phone there, and desperately he grabbed it, took down the hard rubber receiver. He slipped a nickel in and made the long dial to operator. It took three rings and then the suspense was over. A voice said, "Your call, please!" and Chadbourne nearly whimpered with relief.

He gave his home number a thousand miles away in the country and fumbled in his pocket furiously for change. As he began to feed quarters into the machine, his fingers steadied and he thought of his mother and his younger brother and the road that wound through the plains towards the red-shingled house, the fields of wheat and the high brown fences that stood against the sky.

And he thought of Kathy.

It took a long time and then his mother's voice answered. She was pleased but surprised. She knew what his salary was, and long-distance calls for no particular reason were a bit expensive. But Edgar's relief was worth it. He asked about everybody and

said—there had to be some reason—that he was going to come home for Easter.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Edgar! We'll be so glad to see you and so will Kathy!"

He hung up then, and an unmistakable voice at his side said, "Calling home, young man?"

It was Dr. Kessler. He'd come unheard up the stairs from the street and now stood at Chadbourne's elbow, his little black eyes regarding the young man intently.

"Yes," said Edgar. "I was telling them I'm going to come home for Easter."

"Ah, home!" said Kessler. "Yes, of course!"

Chadbourne went on up the stairs to his room, feeling the psychiatrist's eyes following him as he went.

LATER that night Edgar collected the books of Kessler's he'd borrowed. He carried them under his arm across the hall to the physician's apartment. He noticed again that the psychiatrist opened the door after his first rap as though he'd been waiting for the visit.

"I wanted to return these, Doctor, and thank you for them."

"Thank you," murmured Kessler.

There was a moment's silence and Edgar shifted awkwardly, and then turned to go.

"Just a minute," the doctor put out a staying hand. "Are you sure you're feeling all right?"

"Why . . . why, yes!"

"I must say you don't look too well, Mr. Chadbourne."

"No? Well, I . . . to tell you the truth, Doctor, I had another one of those spells tonight. I came out of it with that phone call home just before you came up the stairs."

The physician nodded. "I thought as much. Young man, I'm going to suggest that you come up with me to the Institute tomorrow. It might be wise to have another examination up there. Say an X-ray and one or two other things."

Edgar protested, but Kessler would hear none of it.

"And not another word! I would be derelict in my professional duty were I not to follow your case up. After all, I was the attending physician."

Chadbourne argued weakly that he didn't want to take any more time off from work and he was sure he was all right. Hadn't he, Dr. Kessler himself, said there was nothing of a serious nature?

"One cannot always be positive about such a hard fall as yours," the psychiatrist murmured. He waved away any further arguments.

Chadbourne was somewhat uneasy that night as he tried to sleep, and yet Kessler, in many ways, had been more than generous. Why, once when he, Edgar, had made mention of wanting to pay him something, the physician had replied brusquely that he'd "hear none of it!"

Edgar had thought at times of going to another doctor. Possibly getting his company down at the Becker Tower to recommend someone, but that seemed foolish. Kessler, he'd heard Mrs. Bessey say, was a very fine doctor from abroad with the best connections over here now. It was considered a great honor to be connected with the Institute north of the city.

THE next morning when Chadbourne went downstairs to the basement dining room where Mrs. Bessey served a frugal breakfast, Kessler was already waiting for him.

"Ah!" said the medical man, "and are we ready?"

"You really think I ought to go up there, Doctor?"

"Without question! One's health is too precious to take chances with, eh, young man?"

They drove up in a taxi and Kessler said hardly a word but looked out of the window at the panorama of city as they went north until they reached that great granite hospital structure built on the cliffs overlooking the river above the city. This was the Institute.

They stopped at an entrance. The bronze plaque said Wing A Psychiatric. Wing B Neurological. Wing C Psychopathic. Kessler led the way inside and they walked down many long clean-smelling halls, during the course of which nurses and other doctors passed, some of them nodding to Kessler. But he always seemed faintly aloof from them.

They took an elevator and entered a passageway over which was a blue light and the

words, "Disturbed Ward." A few yards down from the entrance, there was a desk with a lamp and a white-jacketed male nurse sitting behind it. He looked up, nodded at Kessler, went back to what he'd been doing.

Further along, there were rooms opening off the hall. Rooms without doors, and inside, Chadbourne, slowing down now so that he fell somewhat back of Kessler, could see people all dressed in the same shapeless gray tunics sitting on rough wooden chairs or cots or on the floor. Some of them still, others making meaningless motions with their hands or feet.

Occasionally there would be the whimpering sound of a cry or a shrill laugh. And then a white-coated male orderly would bustle in or out of one of the rooms. Kessler had stopped ahead and was waiting for him.

"I don't like this very much," Edgar said. "What's the idea of this tour you're taking me on?"

"Patience, young man. There is an interest about these things. Now, I want you to notice a subtle difference. We are stepping over a borderline."

He motioned the way they had come.

"Those other rooms had no doors. *Voila!* Now they do. Thick, padded doors, Chadbourne! And notice the difference in the sounds you will hear!"

They walked more slowly now, Kessler watching his reaction, and Edgar listened. The people they'd left behind had seemed poor, distraught, sad creatures.

But here from behind those closed doors whose secretiveness lent an added sense of ominousness, there came strange sounds . . . not recognizable to Chadbourne as human and yet he knew they must be. They were beast sounds . . . sounds of the unhuman and inhuman and sub-human.

Kessler peered closely at the identifying card on one of the closed doors, and abruptly took Chadbourne by the arm.

"Let me show you something." He opened the door and stepped inside, Edgar hesitantly following

"Say, now look, Dr. Kessler, I haven't got the time. . . ."

"Come in here!" It was an order that demanded obedience. Chadbourne stepped inside, the door slowly latched behind. The room was a sameness everywhere. The walls were of a heavy padded material as was the inside of the door. The bed was simple. There was a wooden table and a wooden chair, and that was all.

A window looked down onto the river and Kessler showed how it could be screwed out to a certain angle but no more, held in place by stiff iron arms, the opening not permitting the demented one to leap to the freedom of death onto the granite cliffs below.

Kessler sat on the little wooden chair then, and said, "Chadbourne, how would you like to be imprisoned here! Not very nice, eh?"

"Certainly not!" Edgar was becoming increasingly impatient and uneasy. "Can we get on with whatever that X-ray business was you had in mind. I'm not supposed to take this amount of time. . . ."

"Patience is not characteristic of the young," murmured Kessler. "However, being young, you are impatient so I suggest that you leave this room."

CHADBOURNE wondered at the abrupt turnabout but needed no second invitation. He went to the door to open it but his fingers found no latch or knob. Only the smooth buffing of the padding on the inside. The door was securely latched and there was no handle to turn it. What foolishness was this, anyway? Chadbourne turned back to the doctor, annoyed at his joke. Kessler was smiling that rare, strange smile of his, showing the little yellow teeth.

"I thought you would be interested to see how these people . . . what we call people . . . live, Chadbourne. I dare say you will always remember this room, eh, my young man? Ah, of course!"

He rose then quickly, stepped to the door and rapped on it loudly with the palm of his hand. In a moment there was a sound from outside, and Kessler repeated the signal. A hard-faced male orderly swung the portal open, nodding to Kessler and leering at Chadbourne as he did so.

The doctor hurried away along the passageway, Chadbourne following. They passed another desk where two orderlies sat, through a door and found themselves in a large airy, sun-filled room with tables and chairs and comfortable lounges.

"This is the physicians' dining room," Kessler explained. "Undoubtedly you find it considerably more pleasant. Possibly *they* would too!" He jerked his thumb back the way they'd come. "You will notice our windows here. See?" He stepped to one of them. "They open *all* the way!"

Chadbourne looked. They were the same type of French window as in the rest of the hospital, but they swiveled out normally. He looked down far below at the base of the hospital foundation and the granite rocks, beside which ran tracks of the South Shore Railroad.

A freight was picking up speed for the long haul out of the city. Edgar wondered how many times the inmates of the Institute peered through those locked windows, looked down and saw the trains going by. And if they had enough of their minds left to yearn for the freedom there below them.

Kessler snapped his fingers suddenly.

"You are all right! I have decided. I've been watching you closely. I shall not waste the city's money on an X-ray of your splendid skull!"

He made a little ironic bow. A rush of things came to Chadbourne's lips about wasting his time taking him through the Disturbed Ward, all these other incidentals.

But perhaps Kessler was right and knew best. And perhaps observing him on this circuitous route through the hospital was a part of his diagnosis, contributing to his decision more than medical examinations.

"I have some patients to see!"

Chadbourne thought there was a slight inflection on the word "patients," but it might have been his imagination.

"Take this hall and the elevator at its end."

A curt bob of the head signified goodbye and the brusque little doctor was off.

Chadbourne found his way out of the Institute, breathing happily on reaching the street. He looked back up at the tall building, feeling sorry for those inside who could never simply walk out as he had.

IT WAS that night that he had the first of the dreams. The rest of the day was uneventful. He had gone to his job and come home without anything unusual happening. He had listened to the radio till eleven or so and then gone to sleep.

Perhaps it was quite understandable, but the dream was vivid enough to be most painful, the way dreams are when they are so very real. He was in that room again. The little gray barren room with the one window that wouldn't even open properly, and Kessler was talking to him, talking on and on.

Although what he said was not part of the dream, Chadbourne could see so clearly the lips of the man working as he spoke. The small black eyes fixed unwaveringly on his own, and beyond them the padded walls on four sides and the door that wouldn't open. In his dream Chadbourne had that most usual sensation that he could not get up off the cot, that he could not answer Kessler back but lay there, a prisoner to some strange paralysis of mind and body while the psychiatrist talked on and on and on.

He woke up. It was still dark. His pillow and sheets were wet with sweat, and then his heart and mind quieted as he parsed reality from unreality.

He lay for a while on his back looking up at the ceiling and listening to the reassuring night sounds of the city coming in through his half open window, and his mind flew through the darkness up to that granite monument on the cliff tops north of the city.

That monument to Man's twistedness and abnormality and degradation of soul and mind. He felt an almost personal sense of pity and then an indignation that he should have been so affected by his trip up there with Kessler. Damn the guy, anyway! What was he trying to do?

The next day and the next went smoothly, and Chadbourne did not see Kessler. Once he asked Mrs. Bessey, and she said,

"Oh, I can't keep track of the comings and goings of people in this house. I don't know. Maybe he sleeps up at the hospital sometimes."

It was the fourth night that Chadbourne had the same dream again. The same, only more trying on him. More vivid. Longer. A greater ordeal, and when he woke up in the small hours of the morning shaking with the terror of the thing, the shame that a

grown man of his age should react thusly was the smallest part of his troubles.

For he now had two things to fear and to dread. His strange occasional experiences of "loneliness" and this terribly vivid dream that was as real as any part of his life had ever been or could ever hope to be, it seemed. And deep down inside as he lay on his back the rest of the night not sleeping but tossing and turning feverishly, he kept divining intuitively that there was some connection between the one experience and the other. The strange delusion and the dream.

Not knowing quite why, for he still felt a certain gratefulness to the man for caring for him, Edgar began to avoid Kessler as much as possible. And he carried around with himself day and night a fear of the two things that happened to him.

He developed the habit of leaving the Becker Tower at night, with a companion, for that seemed to give him a tighter hold on reality. And at night he would listen to his radio late until he got so tired and sleepy he could hardly sit up, and then there seemed less danger, or so he thought, of the vivid nightmares about the terrible grim room with the padded walls and door that did not open.

But every now and then the dream would slip through his defenses. Instead of frightening him less, its affects were even more devastating, and he began, in the nightmare, to be able to detect some of Kessler's words as the physician droned on seated by the cot.

It was strange talk, and some of it still remained in Chadbourne's mind when he awoke, sweat-soaked and threshing. The words and phrases were peculiar even if he could remember their sequence. They made little sense, reminding him only of that passage in "Occult Factors in Psychology."

CHADBOURNE grew paler and lost weight. Mrs. Joplin remarked on it and so did Mrs. Bessey. Finally, at the suggestion of some of his co-workers, he sought out the doctor who examined for the company. That worthy was a jolly-faced, middle-aged individual who thumped Chadbourne's chest, took his blood pressure, listened to his heart, listened to the story of the head injury (although for some reason that he was annoyed with afterward, Edgar did not mention his delusion of loneliness nor his nightmares), and pronounced him quite fit.

The doctor suggested that Edgar get a bit more exercise and sleep and put on some weight.

It was a week later when Chadbourne had been somewhat free for a few nights of his unpleasant dreams and was trying manfully to relegate these experiences of the last couple of months into the background, when it happened again.

He had avoided working late recently, but this night it could not be got around, and when he stepped out into the empty hall of the Tower Building well past seven p.m., he had the uncomfortable feeling that the cycle was about to start again.

The elevator door finally opened and Chadbourne stepped in. It was a shock but not a surprise to notice that he was alone in the car. There was, this time, not even an operator. When the car reached the ground floor, Chadbourne was shaking. He looked neither to left nor right, knowing there would be no starter nor anyone else in the foyer, but fairly skittered into the street.

The last few weeks with their sleeplessness and worry had taken a toll. Chadbourne rushed along the desolate pavements this night without an attempt to control his pace or his feelings. It was all too much. The lighted empty stores, the hot-dog-and-orange-juice stand on the corner with half-finished glasses of liquid on the counter as though left there just a fraction ago by someone who was now no more. The subway kiosks, usually so crowded, now deserted.

Finally Chadbourne made home and ran up the stairs, his steps ringing through the lonely house. This time though there was no desire in him to fight, to temporize, or to reason out the thing.

He paused on the second-floor landing, shoved a nickel into the phone there and dialed the operator. It had worked before. His first finger trembled as he placed it in the last slot and twirled the metal shield. It rang once . . . twice . . . three times—sometimes they're busy, they take time to answer—five, six, seven rings He felt a

mustache of sweat. He pulled at his ear lobe agitatedly.

It was more than a dozen rings before he hung up, waited for his nickel to shoot back, and as fast as he retrieved it, placed it in the slot again, and again dialed operator. This time there was no mistake, for he leaned there, he didn't know quite how long, and the signal droned on at its mathematical intervals. But no one answered!

He hung up a second time, and a third time tried the phone. This time completely panic-stricken, he dialed the number of the local police precinct scribbled on the pad by the phone with the Fire Department number and the plumber. He heard the click of contact points and then the bell was ringing. But there was no reply!

Chadbourne jammed up the phone and leaped on up to his room. He found it hard to sit down. There was a building tension in him that clutched at his throat and made it hard to breathe.

Finally he tore from his room, went across the way to Kessler's. He rapped but there was no answer. He tried the doorknob cautiously, and to his surprise it was open! He pushed into the room, snapping the wall switch. There was no one there! What was more, the room was empty of Kessler's books and clothes and various medical paraphernalia. It was tidied and neat as though waiting for a new boarder.

Chadbourne went through the house then. Mrs. Joplin, the saxophone player, the seamstress on the ground floor and down into the basement where Mrs. Bessey held forth. But there was no one! Not even the ubiquitous gray cat that curled in the proprietoress' easy chair if it was not prowling around the sub-cellar below.

Chadbourne came back up the stairs calling as he came, his voice a sad crying sound. He reached his room again and double-locked the door. He lay on his bed and sobbed. He wished now he'd kept some of the sedatives Kessler had given him some time ago, but he'd thrown them out thinking possibly they were not good to take for any length of time.

HE LAY there on his bed, alone in the house and in the city and in the world, for all he knew. And as he lay, the commonplace scene of his little room seemed to blend in with a remembered one, and although he was sure he was not asleep and dreaming, Chadbourne began to see against his own prosaic walls, the padded sides of that other place with the small prisoner's window in the corner looking down from the heights to the base of the cliffs, the railroad tracks and the river that ran beyond them.

And suddenly, although in this mind-picture there was no transition from waking to sleeping, it seemed that Kessler sat at his side and talked to him in a low droning voice that went on and on like the tide at seashore. And Kessler was saying these words Chadbourne could now make out and make sense of:

"*This* is the realness. *You* are the realness. There is nothing else but what you have dreamed to be. You are God. You are immortality. You are Eternity. There is nothing else before you or beyond you. These others are what you have thought up to amuse yourself, and now they amuse you not!"

Kessler's voice grew louder and his sharp features seemed to come closer. Chadbourne came off his bed with a scream. He felt for the door and for a moment there was the ghastly smoothness of padding! He could swear that! Swear it!

But then he found a knob and wrenched it open and he was on the stairs thundering down one flight, two flights—and suddenly he was confronted by Mrs. Bessey.

"Was that you making those terrible noises, Mister Chadbourne?" she reproached.

He sank down on the stairs at her feet.

"Now you aren't feeling right, are you!"

"Where's Dr. Kessler!" he managed to get out.

"Oh, the doctor? Why, he moved several days ago. I thought you probably knew. I don't really know where he's gone. I guess to stay up at the hospital or around there."

Chadbourne got to his feet and started upward again. He noticed with a part of his mind that thankfully still functioned in commonplace channels that the saxophonist was improving. There was more melody than discord now, and Mrs. Joplin's youngest was screaming for a nickel.

The next day was uphill agony. The usual

easy things—his tasks at the office, getting to and from—they were all effortful, for Chadbourne was weighted down with the fear that had grown from a small seed deep inside him into a blossoming all-consuming monster.

It now seemed more than likely to him that he was losing his mind, either as a result of that fall or other factors unknown. But he resisted the part of his conscience that said, "Go somewhere! Get an opinion. Get the company doctor to find a psychiatrist." For when he though of that step and of a psychiatrist, he though of Kessler, and Kessler made him think of that bleak, granite institution on the cliff tops at the north of the city. And he thought that whatever happened, whatever became of him, he would not . . . could not go to a place like that to become one of those lost souls locked away from their fellow men in small padded vacuums of their own exquisite agony.

It was only a week or so more, he reasoned by his desk calendar, before the Friday noon would come when he was going back home for the Easter weekend.

THOSE days were among the hardest Chadbourne ever spent. He postponed going back to the rooming house nights so much that Mrs. Bessey referred to him as a newfangled gadabout. He had a scare one evening when after work he ate downtown and then went to a late movie. He was watching the film when suddenly he looked around, and it seemed, found himself alone in the auditorium!

He got up quickly, his heart already pounding and his mouth dry in anticipation of the ordeal he expected. But then there was a colored porter in the lobby cleaning up chewing-gum papers and cigarette butts. And through the foyer glass doors, Chadbourne could see an occasional person passing outside on the late-night streets.

Edgar's relief must have shown on his face, for as he passed by, the porter said, "Good picture, suh, huh?"

"Yes. Yes!"

Edgar hurried home feeling elated at his reprieve. But the dreams kept up. Always the same repetitious horrible dream. The padded room, and he looking at it, giving it a slightly distorted dimension from his vantage stretched out on the simple cot, so that even the window set high and at the corner seemed far away and unattainable.

And once it was almost as though he were finding that even if attempted, the window was a fake, a fraud, opening not enough to let freedom either in or out.

Like life, Kessler in the dream hissed at him: "A mirage! A figment of *your* imagination, young man!"

The psychiatrist droned on, and often his words reminded Chadbourne of other words he'd read in some of those translated tomes of the doctor's.

He kept going those last days to the pre-Easter Friday by will-power and doggedness, although he felt now and every morning as he shaved his gray face in front of the mirror that the cause . . . his cause . . . was a bleak one. He had the desire of the very frightened, though, to go home, as if by so doing, these things in him would relent, would be scared off like demons, by the love of those who were fond of him.

The momentous Friday finally came. In the general pre-holiday office hilarity, they jolly-good-fellowed Edgar, cautioned him to get rested up. "You look a little peaked, Son," they admonished.

One of the bosses was going South, but Edgar's trip was the longest among the subordinates. Somebody gave him a box of chocolates, which he, not liking them, turned over to Mrs. Joplin when he got back to the rooming house to pack that early afternoon, it being but a half day at the Becker Tower.

He told Mrs. Bessey that of course he'd be back, but secretly thought to himself that he wouldn't. He was paid up through the following Monday and she would stand to lose nothing by it.

He packed, but the business did not prevent his mind from thinking of the problems that were uppermost therein. He wondered again about Dr. Kessler. Was it natural that the man had never returned here since he'd left, wherever he'd gone to . . . or perhaps it was perfectly natural. He'd never charged Chadbourne a thing. That was kindness of a sort, especially from one of those foreign doctors who are known for

their characteristic heavy charging and dubious ethics.

He finally had his two suitcases packed and left the rooming house. He allowed himself the luxury of a taxi to the terminal and then because he'd left time for the bus, had something of a wait aboard the train before it pulled out.

Chadbourne felt happier than he had in some time. The bustle of so many people, the excitement of the beginning of his trip home served to raise his spirits somewhat.

THEY came out of the underground after a while, and the express started along the ribbons of steel that paralleled the river. Finally he knew where they were. With some distaste and reluctance Chadbourne pressed his head against the window. Yes, there were the cliffs rising ahead and on top of them the great granite bulk of the Institute.

He suppressed an inner shudder and turned his attention to a magazine as they passed by the place. The magazine took him to dinner time. Then he went in and sat at a table with a drummer from the West Coast and two girls going home on finishing-school vacation. The conversation was light and pleasant and Chadbourne ate the best meal he'd eaten all week.

The porter had his upper made when he got back to the Pullman. There was a nice old man heading for a convention of shoe manufacturers in the lower. They chatted for a while and then the old man said, "Well, guess I'll turn in. Porter wakes me at five-thirty. That's when I've got to get off! You're lucky!"

Edgar climbed into his berth, undressed, and by the little corner light read his magazine for a while and then lulled by the restful motion of the sleeping car, the far-off and reassuring whistle of the locomotive somewhere up in the darkness and the rhythmical rattle of wheel clicks on the rails, Chadbourne fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

It was the shock and vibration that woke him. The train jounced, moved slowly a bit further, and then jounced again to a stop. The radium hand on his wristwatch said quarter to five. Probably they were changing engines somewhere. He lay there like that for a time listening to the noises of the railroad. Finally, there was another jerk, smoother this time, the sound of slack being taken up in the couplings, and then the engine and its string began to move.

The tempo of puffing accelerated and they were off again. It was hard to get back to sleep and he lay for some time thinking. He was pleased with the restfulness of his mind and wondered if the trip and change of scenery had worked this wonder. The city, his job, Kessler and the Institute seemed far away. His frightening experiences there seemed even further.

As the hands of his watch crept around towards five-thirty, Chadbourne pitied the elderly man in the lower berth beneath him having to be roused out of bed at this hour and sent out into the cold darkness of predawn.

Chadbourne's luminous wristwatch hand stood at five-thirty when he felt the train begin to slow down. He realized then that the porter had slipped up on calling the man beneath him. Playing the good samaritan, he stuck his head through the curtains and looked downward. There was no sound and no noise. Chadbourne quickly reached for his bathrobe and slippers and went down the steps.

"Hey," he whispered at the old man's lower-berth curtain.

There was no reply. The train was slowing even more. This certainly must be the stop. He waved the curtains gently. Then on impulse he stuck his fingers through and unhooked a button. He looked in. The berth was empty! Funny. He'd been lying awake since quarter to five. Funny that the old man had gotten out and dressed more than forty-five minutes before his stop without Edgar hearing him.

He went through the car and stood in the vestibule at the end. He found a cigarette in his dressing-gown pocket, lit it. The long string of cars slid into a small country oasis of light. It was a tiny station and the train stopped almost resentfully, huffing and puffing up front and ringing its bell, so impatient to be off.

The platform was completely empty, although Chadbourne looked as far as he could from the vestibule door window up and down to see if the elderly man had got-

ten off all right. There was no one in sight . . . anywhere!

The train shook itself and its cars, huffed and puffed again, and started off into the night. There's something about a country railroad station at night, Edgar thought. There's a romance about it, a loneliness . . . a loneliness!

THAT gave him the feeling and he left the vestibule. He came to his own berth and again looked into the old man's. Empty. He walked back down the train then and told himself how silly this was. What if he didn't see a porter anywhere! And then because the fear of having some startled woman scream at him was less than this other fear, he opened a curtain here and there and looked in. And always the berths were empty! Rumpled and open, if you please, but empty of any human!

He walked the length of the sleepers and then forward to the dining car. There was no one. He was alone on the train! Forward of the diner was a baggage car, locked as usual from the rest of the train. He thundered on the door. Certainly even the sleepiest conductor would hear that! But there was no reply and no sound from within.

The first streaks of a chill dawn were across the dark sky as he tore back through the train, here and there stopping at random looking in a berth like a child who's lost his parent. But he knew now what had happened. He was quite alone.

The train chugged on through flat, rolling countryside. It grew lighter and a brilliant sun came up. But nowhere was there any life on the express. Chadbourne spent the slowly passing hours with a thousand different thoughts and a hundred different meaningless little errands around the train. He found the porter's shoe-shining equipment in one of the rest rooms laid out neatly along with a half-dozen pairs of shoes . . . but no porter, and no one else! Anywhere!

He changed from his pajamas into regular clothes feverishly and packed his belongings, as though those things really mattered. It was seven-thirty and then eight, and then it moved on towards nine. At nine they came to his stop. He went through the train again to be sure. By this time, the berths should have been made up. The sleeping cars should be Pullman seats again. But his was the only activity on the train. He tried to reason the thing out. He tried desperately, as though his life depended on it . . . as perhaps it did. But here he was. He knew his name. Where he was going and from whence he had come. He could feel the hard metal of the train side. He knew that at such-and-such an hour in a few moments he would arrive at his own stop and that the train would halt there. About this other strangeness, this delusion, he could not guess.

He was waiting at the vestibule door as the train tolled the long bell that sent it thundering across Scofields' Plain, at the end of which stood the little station. They were slowing down. They were stopping, and Edgar Chadbourne got off at the tiny platform. He had barely set foot on the ground and put his two suitcases down when the train shook to life again and slid out of the station, the engine drawing its string of empty cars into the distance, throwing up a white plume of smoke into the morning chilliness.

He watched the train down the long straightaway that ran from the station. He could see it for miles with its mushroom of white above it against the blue sky. And then it was gone and he turned to face what he feared to face—the empty station. No transportation for him though they'd known he was arriving and when.

HE BEGAN the walk down from the station, weighted down with his two suitcases, hindered by his city shoes. It was a long way to home, but that was where he wanted to get more than anywhere else.

He passed the Presbyterian Church and the general store where Old Man Allen used to hold forth. He didn't even bother to look inside. He knew there was no one. There was the tiny volunteer Fire Department with the chairs tilted against the house outside, never before empty in his memory. On the outskirts of town he could see a silo bulging with hay, its red roof and silver cock weather vane against the sky.

He turned across the fields because it was shorter that way, and the hard, still-frozen earth made walking difficult. Or perhaps he'd come this way because of the school. It was the same school he'd been to, and his

mother had written him after she'd said, "We're so happy you're coming, Edgar, for a visit," that Kathy would be rehearsing her music pupils at the school Saturday morning. And his mother had suggested that when Mr. Appleby (she'd told him to meet the city train) picked him up at the station, why didn't they come home by way of the school so he could see Kathy and her pupils?

There it was. Why, it had been repainted since he saw it last! But the broad ugly, lovely outlines were unchanged. The cupola on top and the bell that you could hear and curse across the fields down to the fishing stream on those first school days in September when there were a million other things you'd rather do than the three R's.

Everything about the schoolhouse was the same. The neatly rolled yard out front where they'd played. The flagpole he'd shinnied up once and had to write on the blackboard a hundred times, "I'm a foolish boy who wants to break his neck." But there was nobody. Nobody! No pupils. No Kathy. The piano—he went over and looked through the side window—was sitting, half its keys in a shaft of morning sunlight. Otherwise alone.

Edgar began to run in the direction that was his home. Somewhere along the way he dropped his suitcases. He fell several times, and the neatly pressed trousers became ragged and dirty. Through his mind raced other images. The nightmares and the three experiences like this back in the city. The nightmares were Kessler and Kessler talking, and the things that he said in the dream now made a kind of sense . . . that life was a fraud and a masquerade.

Somehow, he found the red-shingled house and took its emptiness with an exhausted stoicism. He trudged on to the Corners. Kathy's home was the same. All of her things . . . all of her personified, but no Kathy. And her aged father who'd been bedridden for years—he was also gone into a strange vacuum into which all of life had been sucked!

This time Chadbourne knew there'd be no changing back.

"When you stop imagining . . ." he could hear Kessler droning as though the man were standing with him although, of course, he wasn't. "When you stop imagining and stop believing, these imaginings and people built up through eons of time are no more! You, yourself, may be an 'imagining,' a 'believed-in' of someone else. And then so surely as the sun and tides . . . *you* will be no more! We call it death!"

EDGAR went through the surrounding countryside and land, then, not knowing where he was going but marching grimly as though he had to get there. He took in the scenery as he never had before. The stark brown trees standing sentinel in the fields. The dried cornstalks silhouetted against the western sky. The rude fences and lines of boulders dividing this man's land from that.

Suddenly it became unendurable, an emotion that superseded the horror and terror. Chadbourne ran as he'd never run before, and the way he was running, he came quickly to the ravine. He stood poised at the crest and looked down. It was not such a drop, but that sound in the distance coming this way made it the depth and breadth of life itself!

He jumped and landed sprawling on the tracks and ballast, not minding the sharp pain in his ankle and arm. It seemed so perfectly right that he was here—the only solution, and he was glad for the sound that was coming closer, the slow-growing earthquake under him.

Even the noise now was droning out Kessler's words, and Chadbourne lay there with delicious expectation. At the near-crescendo of noise, some primeval instinct took hold of him in his brain and arteries and muscles at the last fractional second. With the roaring of the whistle and the hissing of steam all around him, he lurched sideways like a great wounded frog, and sprawled by the right-of-way.

HE KNEW nothing again until his wakening feet felt the cool of sheets and another coolness that was a hand on his head. And without opening his eyes, he knew he was home, and opening them, Edgar saw his mother and Kathy.

"You're all right," they said, and the love in their faces reaching out towards him was a more real feeling than the heavy cast on his left arm.

They petted him and pampered him, and

Edgar's young brother peered in the door and waved. The doctor had just gone, they told him. He was going to be all right. He had a broken arm and a sprained ankle and he'd been unconscious for some hours with the blow on the head.

"Oh, Edgar!" his mother broke down, "you've been working too hard! Imagine getting *lost* coming back to your own home!"

Edgar smiled and filled his eyes with Kathy. She was just as lovely . . . but there was something else. A maturity that hadn't been there before. He knew now they were ready for one another and realized that she knew it, too.

He lay there peacefully in bed looking out the window at the sunny fields, at the dog running with his brother, and he wondered why he was so happy and why he was completely free of fear.

He wrote Mrs. Bessey and his employer letters on his doctor's advice, explaining that he would be staying out here for some time.

And in the post a week later, he had delivered to him two letters in return. Edgar was up and around now, his ankle heavily bandaged and arm-in-cast not bothering him, feeling his strength coming back both of mind and body.

He'd been doing some simple chores for his mother and he went out on the porch with the two letters his brother had brought from town. He was to see Kathy that night, and there was nothing in the world to worry about.

HE LAID aside the letter in Mrs. Bessey's obvious handwriting unopened, and looked at the other. He slit it and took out the sheet of paper, frowning down at it. The salutation was simply, "My young friend. . . ." and from that he knew it was Kessler and he thought of the man for the first time in this glorious week, but now without bother or misgiving.

He read the words of the cramped handwriting, read the letter twice. There was a reminiscent ring to these phrases and much of it was virtually un-understandable. Kessler, Chadbourne suddenly realized, must be a demented person. The only thing he agreed with as sound advice was the psychiatrist's last sentence: "I would suggest that you burn this letter."

Edgar read it a third time, trying to get the sense out of it before consigning it to the kitchen stove.

"I chose you as a likely subject, Chadbourne, because of the fortuitous event of your accident. I found you were suggestable. You will remember that I am not young but old, and oldness, my young man, is a disease of the Great Mind. When those about us who have believed us into being, grow tired with the pattern that is us, we die, and that is death.

"To perpetuate the only individualistic thing in life, which is one's ego, one must find another caravan for one's soul, for it can be transferred, my young friend, and you and I were to make that transference!

"The fact that you have received this letter, though, is my acknowledgement of defeat. You see, Chadbourne, and this is an ironic truth, you are the focus, apparently, of more belief and affection than I, the great Dr. Kessler. You, in your ignorance, have proved too strong, and I, in my knowledge, have been too weak!"

Chadbourne impatiently put the letter aside and opened up Mrs. Bessey's note. It was ebullient and sorrowful. They would miss him. She'd looked upon him almost as a son, but of course, his own mother would want him for a while. She hoped he was feeling better, and oh, yes, he probably hadn't heard the news. She enclosed the clipping.

Chadbourne held the paper oblong clipped rudely from a city daily. It was datelined just a week ago and described the demise of one, "Josef F. Kessler, M.D., who leapt or fell to his death from a window of the doctors' dining room in the Institute Mental Hospital to which he was attached. His body landed on the South Shore Railroad tracks below and was mangled beyond recognition by a passing train."

Chadbourne laid the clipping and Mrs. Bessey's letter aside. He recalled the Institute as part of an old, almost-forgotten memory. And the physician's private dining room on the uppermost floor. The only room in the hospital where the windows opened!

Nemesis

BY HAROLD LAWLOR

SOMETHING was wrong.

I'd opened the door of our apartment and stood aside to let Madeline precede me into the reception hall. She hadn't gone three paces when I saw her come to a dead stop, saw her stand there poised warily, sensed rather than saw the slow stiffening of her back as if she were steeling herself against an expected blow.

As quickly as that the air was pregnant with fear.

But of what, I didn't know.

I shut the door behind me and moved till I was standing near her. "What is it?" I asked. And I remember I was faintly annoyed that unconsciously I had whispered.

Madeline threw a glance over her shoulder, a glance that didn't really see me. Her dark eyes were wide with alarm, and her slightly parted lips were trembling.

"George—" Her voice was the merest breath of sound. "George, do you notice—anything?"

I listened, straining, thinking it was some noise she had heard in the darkened apartment that had caused her alarm. But the place was quiet, and all seemed well.

I was puzzled.

And then I caught it. And I could imagine nothing less frightening. Just the faintest aroma, a scent that carried me back six months to our wedding day and the flower I'd worn in my lapel. Spicy. Pungent. Growing somewhat stronger as I sniffed.

"Why, it's only carna'ions," I said, relieved. "The scent of carnations."

"Yes." Madeline was nodding jerkily. "The scent of carnations. How—how queer!"

It was absurd, but she was really quite pale.

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

"Trouble, trouble, go away—
don't come back and kill me!"

I said, "Some of your perfume must have spilled in the bedroom."

"You know I never use perfume," Madeline said.

"Or maybe Minnie arranged fresh flowers before she left for the day."

"Oh." Madeline grasped at the idea with relief that seemed exaggerated out of all proportion. The color began slowly to seep back into her cheeks. "Of course. Minnie."

We went through the arch into the living room, and looked around. Arranged on the piano in the blue-green crystal vase we'd brought back from our Mexican honeymoon were spikes of gladioli. They were attractive, but even I knew they were quite scentless. And there were no other flowers in the room.

There were no carnations anywhere about.

As she realized this, Madeline sank into a chair, and her face was ghastly. I was completely bewildered and more than a little alarmed—chiefly, I think, because I could see no real reason *for* alarm.

I said, "My dear, this is ridiculous! Surely there could be nothing less fearsome than the scent of flowers? Why should the odor of carnations—even if we can't explain where it's coming from—cause you to look so—so—"

I stumbled, unable to put into exact words just how she did look.

She smiled wanly, and stood up. "I know. I'm being silly." For a moment her eyes were clouded, remembering. "It's just that—that someone I once knew always used it. It was her favorite scent." She shrugged then, and smiled her wide, gay smile. "Let's forget it. Come on, I'll split a bottle of beer with you before we go to bed."

The odor of carnations had grown fainter as we talked, until now I could no longer smell it. Madeline must have noted its disappearance, too. Or was it merely my fancy that the look of relief on her face seemed to deepen?

We had our beer, and we went to bed, and by morning I'd completely forgotten the odd little incident. But I know now it was the beginning and the end. The beginning of that strange period we were to live through, and the end of all our happiness.

For we'd been incredibly happy. I still couldn't believe my luck. That I, a dull, prosy bachelor lawyer of forty-two, six years her senior, had succeeded in winning Madeline Ames, the actress, for my wife.

I'd first met her when she'd come to me for help with legal difficulties that had arisen in connection with a contract she'd signed. Business meetings at first led to social ones, liking and admiration developed into love, and we were married at the close of her successful two years' run in *Swampfire*.

Except for her last ten years on the New York stage, I knew literally nothing of her early life. But what did her past matter when I had all her future?

I had no objection to her continuing with her career, but Madeline said no. She'd been continually before the public in the last ten years. She had grown a little stale, and she thought she'd rest a year or two, and give audiences a chance to miss her.

So we were happy. And if there's any comfort to be extracted from the grief I know now, it lies in the memory that at least we had those six perfect months.

Until the night we returned to be met in the hall by the haunting fragrance of carnations, innocent enough seemingly, but so inexplicably disturbing to Madeline.

But as I said, that was only the beginning.

THERE was a bizarre occurrence at dinner the next evening.

Madeline and I were dining alone, sitting at opposite ends of the long mahogany table bearing its delicate litter of lace and silver and crystal. Madeline was in a long flowing hostess gown of Directoire red velvet that made a bright foil for the pallor of her skin, the dusky halo of her hair. We were dawdling over *creme de cacao* and coffee when it happened, and there was no one else in the apartment save Minnie, busy in the kitchen.

That was what puzzled me later.

For as we sat there chatting desultorily to the clink of china being washed in the kitchen by Minnie, the record-playing attachment of our radio-phonograph in the living room at the front of the apartment started up—apparently of itself. For none of the three of us had been in the living room for a half-hour or more.

The strains of the music floated eerily down the long gallery from the living room to where we were sitting in the dining room.

A woman's voice singing softly, softly, weaving a web of dream-like enchantment. I recognized the song, *My Blue Heaven*, popular when I was a young man. . . .

When whip-poor-wills call
And evening is nigh
We're happy in
My Blue Heaven. . . .

At first it didn't occur to me to wonder how the phonograph had started up. For I was looking at Madeline. A Madeline who stared at her plate with horror-haunted eyes. I sat there as one in a spell, watching the knuckles leap out whitely to make of Madeline's pale hand a claw. . . .

A turn to the right
A little white light. . . .

Madeline's head sank lower, and I saw the bright glitter of tears on her cheeks. And then, evanescently, the faintest fragrance of carnations was wafted into the room, while Madeline's head drooped like a pale flower, and the tears continued to roll slowly down her cheeks. . . .

Will lead you to
My Blue Heaven.

I think I would have sat there helpless till the song finished had not Minnie pushed open the swinging door from the kitchen to see if we wanted anything, effectively breaking the enchantment.

Madeline looked up, too, and she said dully, "Go in and shut it off, George, please."

There was something in Madeline's voice, hinting of the breaking point, that made me stifle the questions on my lips and hasten to do as she had asked.

In the living room I stopped the machine, and took the record from the turn-table. It seemed to be a home-recording. I was positive I knew every record in my library, equally positive I'd never owned such a record as this one. And even if I had, how could it possibly have started playing by itself? I stood there, turning it over and over, as if its mute black face could give me some clue.

I was uneasy. And—I don't know why—a faint sensation of chill went slowly up my spine.

When I put it down at last and went back to the dining room, Madeline's behavior didn't serve to allay my disquiet. She was still sitting there, looking numbly before her, like a woman stunned.

"The fragrance of carnations," she said softly, "and the song *My Blue Heaven*. Someone—I used to know—loved them both." She shivered very slightly. Her eyes, wide as a bewildered child's met mine. "How strange that they should come back—*now*—to haunt me."

But before I could speak she said an even stranger thing. And when, startled, I would have pressed her for her meaning, she turned toward me a face so stricken I should have felt myself a brute to harass her.

But I was sorely puzzled.

For, leaning forward in her chair a little, she had asked me intensely, "Do *you* believe in ghosts?"

II

THERE was a hiatus then of a few days before anything happened again. Days in which Madeline was unnaturally quiet. At what seemed to be her tacit request, I forebore to question her. But I often thought of that query she'd put me: "Do you believe in ghosts?" And I couldn't help wondering what particular ghost—if ghosts there were—it was that Madeline feared.

For that she was afraid—of *something*—there could be no doubt.

Nevertheless, I'd almost succeeded in banishing those peculiar incidents from my mind, when I was abruptly and unpleasantly reminded again on that night nearly a week later.

Again we'd been out. We'd had dinner and gone to a play with the Baxters, and the evening had been more of a social duty than a pleasure. I remember Madeline's hand was lifted, politely stifling a yawn, when we entered our apartment alone after dropping the Baxters at their address. As was our habit, we went into the living room for a nightcap.

She had scarcely passed through the archway when I saw Madeline come to an abrupt halt. And again I saw her back stiffen. And

the back of her hand, still stifling the yawn, was frozen at her mouth.

But now it seemed as if it served to repress a scream.

She was staring rigidly before her at the green brocaded lounge chair nearest the fireplace. An open book with a red morocco leather cover lay across its arm, and the down cushion was indented as if from the recent pressure of someone's body.

I was instantly aware of Madeline's alarm, but I understood only imperfectly as yet the cause of it. I sought to dispel it, whatever its cause, by saying in an off-hand manner, "Minnie must have been taking it easy for herself just before she went home."

Madeline shook her head. Unwillingly, it seemed, for I had the fleeting impression that she would have liked to believe me. But she said, "Minnie left tonight before we did. And I plumped up that seat-cushion myself, just before we went."

That was true. I remembered distinctly. Somewhat at a loss, I walked over to the chair and picked up the open book. I glanced at the title engraved in gold on its spine.

"*The Rubaiyat,*" I said.

Surprisingly enough, Madeline nodded matter-of-factly. "It *would* be *The Rubaiyat. She* liked it."

It didn't occur to me to ask her *who* liked it. I couldn't seem to take in more than one thing at a time. I was looking at the book numbly. "But this isn't my copy. Mine is bound in black silk."

Again Madeline seemed unsurprised. "Of course, it isn't your copy. Look at the book-plate on the title page. She wants me to know she was here." She was speaking like a woman in a trance. "It belongs to Clelie Shayne."

There *was* a book-plate, I found now. Of a ship in full sail, beneath which was a fluttering phylactery bearing the single word, *Beyond!* And under this, *Ex Libris, Clelie Shayne.*

"Why, how did you know?" I asked wonderingly. I had never even heard of anyone named Clelie Shayne.

Madeline didn't answer. She hadn't moved from where she'd first frozen into position. She just kept looking before her at nothing, and in her eyes was the look of someone remembering something from the distant past. Something she would gladly have forgotten. I felt curiously shut out, shut away from Madeline's inmost self, for the first time since we'd been married.

And as we stood there, immobile as any two figures in a frieze, there came again almost mischievously the faint yet pungent, spicy odor of carnations!

It was then Madeline did the thing that really frightened me. She spoke, but not to me, yet there was no one else in the room. She spoke to someone—or some presence—that I couldn't see.

She said despairingly, in tones that almost broke my heart with their hopelessness, "Ah, why did you wait till now? Why did you wait till I was happier than I've ever been?" For a moment she waited, head tilted, as if for an answer. And then she nodded, and answered her own question with a sort of dreadful wisdom and a small smile that chilled me to the marrow. "But of course! That's exactly why you've chosen now, isn't it? *Because* I'm happier than I ever was before!"

I can't begin to describe the terror with which her fey manner filled me. It was as if I were witnessing the slow destruction of her mind! I moved forward, and seized her arm, and shook her. "Madeline! Madeline, dear! What's all this about? Tell me, and perhaps I can help you."

Her head turned at that, and her gaze came back from that far-distant place where I could not follow. "Help me? No, you can't help me." Her shoulders sagged. Her voice was on the edge of hysteria. "No one can help me now! For, you see, I know what she wants! And I cannot; I cannot!"

And she fainted then.

I caught her just before she would have fallen.

MADELINE was ill for a day or two after that. Or perhaps it wasn't illness. Perhaps it was only apathy. She was like a woman who'd been dealt so many blows by Fate that she no longer cared what happened. It seemed as if she only waited with resignation for the next blow to fall, and felt herself powerless to avert it.

She lay there in her darkened bedroom, and when gently I begged her to explain, begged her to let me help her if I could, she

only turned her head on the pillow, turned her face to the wall away from me.

Perhaps this seems like nonsense to you. But—was it nonsense that brought that look of dread to Madeline's face? Was it nonsense that a book we didn't own and a record we'd never possessed were able to strike Madeline with this nameless fear? Was Clelie Shayne stealing like an inspired malevolent gnome into our apartment, deliberately trying to terrorize Madeline, to shatter her mental balance by playing these weird tricks upon her?

Or was—as Madeline had more than hinted—our unwelcome guest a ghost? But surely *that* was nonsense?

Above all, who *was* Clelie Shayne? And what did she hope to gain by such *outre* tactics? What was it she wanted of Madeline?

These were the questions to which I gave voice. These were the questions that Madeline stubbornly refused to answer.

I was baffled.

Ghost or not, our visitant was back again two nights later. Madeline felt better by then, well enough to go with me to a small neighborhood theater to see a movie we'd missed when it had played the larger houses.

And again someone had entered our apartment while we were gone.

We'd recently had the living-room walls painted a deep Williamsburg green, against which our book-bindings and brown mahogany furniture gleamed richly. Along one long wall-space was placed a low mirror-fronted credenza, and above this hung a copy of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, its chrome yellows thick and vivid against the dark background of the wall.

We both saw it at one and the same time. It was inescapable.

In our absence someone had removed the painting from the wall. It stood neatly now in one corner. And on the wall-space thus left blank, that same someone, presumably, had written in white chalk:

The truth, Margaret. Or Doom!

My first bewildered thought was, Who is Margaret? And mystified, I turned to see if Madeline could shed any light on this new facet of the puzzle.

She was standing there, her hand at her throat, her mouth opening and closing soundlessly, her eyes glaring fixedly at the handwriting on the wall. And her voice, when she did manage to speak, was only the merest whisper.

"The truth?" Her voice broke. "No." Her chin went up defiantly. "I'll never, never tell! Ah, don't you see? I *can't* tell now. He'd leave me if he knew. Have mercy. If you only knew how bitterly I've regretted, how I've punished myself all these years!"

And again I knew that her words were addressed to someone—or some presence—in the room that I couldn't see. For someone was there. Someone from whom emanated the subtle scent of carnations! It floated in the air about us.

But if it were Clelie Shayne, she did not answer. It was obvious to me by this time—as it surely would have been to anyone—that Madeline understood the reason behind these mysterious visitations even if I didn't. And this time, my questions naturally were more insistent. For I knew Madeline knew. I knew she might have answered if she would.

But she steadfastly refused to answer me. Only once did she say dully, by way of explanation, "If I tell the truth now, I'll lose you."

Maybe I was a fool, but subtly flattered by her words, I subsided. Yet, nevertheless, I was grimly determined that at the next recurrence of any of these bizarre events, I would *do* something!

A week elapsed before I was forced to act upon my vow.

We had spent the evening alone at home—I reading in a chair before the fireplace, Madeline on the sofa, engaged in working on a needlepoint bench cover.

All had been quiet, when I heard her draw her breath in sharply. I knew almost with certainty what it presaged. With a sinking heart, I turned. She was looking at the wall over the credenza.

Again *Sunflowers* had been removed. Again bold chalk script leaped from the green wall:

You've had a week, Margaret, and still you haven't told. My patience is exhausted. It's just as I thought: The truth isn't in you. So be it!

There was something grimly ominous about that: *So be it!* Even I sensed it. And Madeline, paler than the gardenias at her shoulder, slumped slowly forward in a faint.

III

OBVIOUSLY this couldn't go on. Madeline was a wraith, and this time I wasted no breath in fruitless argument or questioning. It seemed to me that the best thing, the only thing to do was to get out of the apartment at once. Perhaps in a new setting this seemingly insane persecution would stop.

At any rate, it was worth a try.

Accordingly when I learned of a house for rent near a small town up the Hudson, I leased it and arranged for our removal at once without consulting Madeline. I was taking no chances on her possible objection. But contrary to my expectations, Madeline offered no resistance to the idea, when I finally told her what I'd done. She was like an automaton those days, but an automaton nonetheless with a grimly set jaw. I knew the meaning of that jawline.

The truth, whatever it was, that she was urged to tell, would never knowingly pass her lips.

So we moved, and apparently my ruse was successful. The *poltergeist*, if such it could be called, stopped bothering us, and we had peace for a while. I commuted daily to work, and every evening when I returned from the office, I looked eagerly to see if Madeline's mental and emotional health were improving. And evidently it was. Some of the color she'd lost began to return to her cheeks, and her eyes gradually shed that clouded look of fear.

There was only one drawback to my plan. I was afraid that Madeline might be bored away from the city. But when the leaders of the local Little Theater learned she was living near town, they approached her with a request to act in and direct one of their productions, and she agreed eagerly.

"I've missed the smell of grease paint," she told me later, "and I've always had a yen to direct." Her smile was gay and brilliant as of old. "It must be the ham in me, darling. You don't mind?"

Mind? I couldn't have been more pleased. I was sure this new interest, if anything, would work the final cure.

But now began an even more puzzling aspect of the affair.

For Madeline began to tell me the most outrageous lies. Absurd lies, stupid lies, utterly meaningless lies that couldn't possibly have gained her a thing even if I'd been fool enough to believe them.

Lying, they say, always has its basis in fear; and as I'd never known Madeline to be afraid of anything (barring the recent *poltergeist*) I'd always found her almost insolently truthful. Which only made her present untruthfulness the more incredible.

I REMEMBER well the first time it happened, marked as it was by absurdity.

I was preparing to leave one morning for the office. It had been threatening rain, and I called to Madeline, "Do you think I ought to take an umbrella? See if it's raining, will you, dear?"

While I waited in the hall, I heard her go and open one of the venetian blinds. Then she answered, "No, it's a beautiful day."

But when I opened the door, it was raining with a quiet, dismal persistence that I knew would keep up for hours!

When Madeline came into the hall for my goodbye kiss, I grumbled fondly, "You must be blind in one eye, darling. Look at that."

Frowning, Madeline looked past me at the rain. "What do you mean?"

"You told me not to take an umbrella, that it was a beautiful day."

"Why, George, I told you no such thing!" She looked at me as if I'd gone out of my mind. "Don't be ridiculous! I distinctly remember telling you that it *was* raining."

Naturally I thought she was joking, though it seemed a pointless jest. But it struck me as odd that she still persisted in it. However, I couldn't pursue the subject further, as I was already late, and had to hurry for my train.

But that evening I caught her in another peculiar falsehood.

Idly, I asked Madeline if she'd been out, and she said, "No, I was home all day because of the rain."

But while we were at dinner, the phone rang and I answered it. It was old Mrs. Bronson on the wire.

"Tell Madeline," she said, "that I have her gloves. I mistakenly picked them up for mine, evidently while I was having luncheon with her in town today."

But Madeline had just told me she'd been home all day!

I said, "Are you sure you had luncheon in town with Madeline *today?*"

"Certainly, I'm sure!" snapped the crotchety old dowager. "I'm not in my dotage yet!"

And she hung up the receiver with an irritated bang.

When I went back to rejoin Madeline, I repeated the conversation in its entirety. She exhibited no confusion in being caught in such a silly, bald-face lie.

I said, "But you told me you weren't out today!"

Madeline turned wide, innocent eyes to mine, and deliberately uttered another lie!

"Really, George! You must be dreaming. I just finished telling you, didn't I, that I had lunch with Mrs. Bronson? She wanted to ask me if I'd let her granddaughter play second lead in the play."

"You told me nothing of the sort!"

We had a heated argument about it, but in the end I apologized. For it seemed I must surely be wrong. As Madeline said, "Why in the world would I bother to lie to you about anything so unimportant?"

I decided I must have been inattentive, though I could have sworn—

But we left it at that, though I was to wish heartily later that we hadn't. For Madeline's next misstatement might have cost me my life.

I ALWAYS drove to the station in the mornings with Madeline accompanying me so that she could drive the car back home for her own use during the day, picking me up again at night.

It was still raining the following morning, and I noticed that the car wasn't braking well. I told Madeline at the station to take it in immediately and have the brakes relined, and she promised that she would.

"You'd better take a cab home from the station tonight," Madeline added. "Even if Al fixes the brakes right away, Mrs. Bronson is giving a tea this afternoon, and I may not be able to get away in time to meet you."

It wasn't until after dinner that evening that I remembered about the brakes.

"Did you have them fixed?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," Madeline said. "The mechanic said the brake linings were nearly gone, but what was worse, there was a leak some place that had permitted most of the hydraulic fluid to escape. He said we were lucky we caught it in time." And she went on, in considerable circumstantial detail to describe how long the job had taken, and how much Al had charged her.

I remember distinctly every word she said. This time I couldn't have been mistaken.

I had to drive into town alone later that evening, and where our local road crosses the superhighway, I was going at a good clip when the traffic light went red against me abruptly. I jammed my right foot down, and the brake went all the way to the floor. But the car didn't lessen its speed!

It happened so fast I had time only for a flashing moment of blind panic. I shot straight through the intersection, and crashed into the side of a truck.

The front end of the car was demolished, but I escaped by a miracle with only cuts and bruises, and a bad knock on the head where I'd nearly gone through the windshield.

Naturally I blamed Al at first. I thought he'd been criminally negligent. But when I called him and he came with the tow-truck, he denied ever touching the brakes. Certainly not that day.

"I haven't had your car in the shop since three weeks ago, when I adjusted your carburetor," Al said stoutly.

He convinced me finally that he was speaking the truth. Which left me only one alternative to believe. That Madeline, fantastically, had again deliberately lied.

I had it out with her when I reached home, and as I'd almost expected, she denied that she'd ever told me she'd had the brakes fixed!

"I told you I *didn't* take the car in to Al's today," she said brazenly. "I meant to, but I couldn't find the time."

I could only look at her in amazement. I said, "Really, Madeline, are you aware that three times now I've caught you telling me the most flagrant lies? I can't conceive what your object is."

She looked at me indignantly. "You know

I always tell you the truth!" Which statement in itself was an outrageous lie, considering her recent behavior.

I shook my head. "I can't understand it. But the truth no longer seems to be in you."

I'd no sooner said those words than my head went up sharply, reminded. Where had I heard those words before? And then I remembered. The handwriting on the wall!

The truth isn't in you.

Madeline must have known by the expression on my face what I was thinking. And she was reminded, too. For her face went the color of clay, and I thought she was going to be actively ill.

I pleaded with her then. I told her I feared for her mental health, and I suggested that she see a psychiatrist. But she grew so hysterical at the suggestion, seemed so obviously terrified by what she might reveal under the probing questions of a psychiatrist, that in mercy I was afraid to insist. Perhaps I should have been ruthless, but I loved her, and love makes cowards of us all.

So I said no more about her lies, making it a rule insofar as I could to avoid asking her any direct questions. But it wasn't pleasant to see her going around like a haunted thing, bearing in her eyes the dumb questioning look of a wounded animal.

And I began to wonder if perhaps my own reason were leaving me. Was it really so, or did I only imagine, that the air of this house too was becoming very faintly scented with the odor of carnations?

IV

I ALMOST hesitate to tell of my meeting with Emory Gordon, for I'm afraid you'll say it's too apt, too pat a coincidence. Yet, it happened. And for a time I, too, thought it coincidence, or the blind working of Fate.

But now—I wonder. Wonder if it weren't the spirit of Clelie Shayne that guided my steps that night, that placed in my hands the tangled threads with which ultimately I might unravel the story.

And why should she have done this? I don't know. Perhaps, knowing the tragic end that was to come, she pitied me and wanted me to understand. For I had done her no harm.

On the night, then, of which I speak, I had absolutely no intention of staying in town or going to the club that evening. Nor can I remember reaching a considered decision to do so. It was quite as if I followed blindly where someone else led.

But about five o'clock, I pulled the telephone to me and put in a long-distance call to Madeline. And when I had her on the wire, I was surprised to find myself telling her not to expect me home to dinner.

"I have to meet a man at the club," I said smoothly.

She took the news equably enough. "We're rehearsing the play tonight," she said, "so when you get back to town, come to the theater and we'll drive home together."

I remember when I hung up the receiver I sat there looking blankly at the telephone. I was amazed at myself. Why in the world had I told Madeline I must go to the club when I had had absolutely no intention of going until the moment of speaking to her? I hadn't even known that was what I was going to say.

But now it seemed absolutely necessary for me to go. I was laboring under some strange compulsion. I strongly felt there was an urgent reason why I should appear there, yet at the same time I could find no reason for my feeling so!

There's a blank in my memory from then on, as if I were one acting under light hypnosis. I must have been able to move and speak without attracting undue attention, for I reached the club without incident. But how I met Gordon, or whose suggestion it was that we dine together, is lost in a vague blur.

It wasn't until I was actually sitting across from him at the table that this queer mental haze lifted, and a curious sense of what I can only call *awareness* stole over me. I knew this man was important to me, for some reason I had yet to learn.

More, I had a wary instinct of dislike for this heavy-set man in his late thirties, who was chatting amiably enough.

"This is fine," he was saying appreciatively. "I'm tired of dining alone. Bachelor life isn't all it's cracked up to be, is it?"

Naturally I told him that I was not a

bachelor, as he was assuming. And as usual I was a trifle smug, I fear, as I said, "My wife is the actress, Madeline Ames."

As Madeline is famous, I've grown somewhat accustomed to the mild sensation this statement usually causes. I'm afraid I've come to expect the exclamations of surprise, like those Gordon was voicing now.

But he didn't stop there.

"You know," he said, reaching for a cracker, "the first time I ever saw Miss Ames on the stage she reminded me of somebody, but I couldn't remember who. You know how resemblances will haunt you? It nearly drove me crazy until I remembered Margaret Shayne, a girl I knew slightly long ago, back home."

"Margaret Shayne?" I repeated, the two names sounding a familiar note that escaped me for the moment. Something made me say, as if reassuring myself, "Ames is Madeline's real name." Which was the truth, so far as I knew.

I DARESAY my voice may have sounded odd. Gordon must have thought I spoke in annoyance, for he went on apologetically, "Oh, I know it isn't the same person. The gestures reminded me, really, more than any close resemblance. Miss Ames is very attractive, but Margaret was a rather plain little thing at the time of her disappearance, eighteen years ago."

For some reason I was beginning to feel vaguely uneasy. There was a faint gnawing sensation of alarm at the pit of my stomach, and the palms of my hands were damp. But I felt that I must go on, however unwillingly. "Disappearance?" I said. "It all sounds very mysterious, as if it might be an interesting story."

"It was, in a way," Gordon admitted. "Though, like the late Will Rogers, I only knew what I read in the papers." He went on reminiscently, "Poor kid, I wonder whatever happened to her? The whole miserable affair must have been a terrible strain for an impressionable young girl. She dropped completely out of sight after the notoriety of Clelie Shayne's trial."

Clelie Shayne!

There it was! The name on the bookplate! And Madeline had known her! And I remembered something else. The handwriting on the wall had been addressed to "Margaret."

And I feared in my heart that at one time Madeline must have been known as Margaret Shayne.

I WAS afraid of what I was about to hear. In my distress I choked then, and Gordon leaped up to offer me water and clap me on the back. When this little confusion was over, I returned to the subject. I had to. I couldn't help myself. It had gone too far—now.

"You spoke of a trial?" I asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of my voice. I had no intention of telling a stranger of the recent peculiar events that had befallen Madeline and me. But there was no harm in pumping him for information that might be useful.

Perhaps, dimly, I had some faint hope in my heart of learning something that would help in exorcising our ghost. "Tell me about it," I suggested.

Luckily Gordon wasn't the type to worry for fear he might be boring me. I was a lawyer, and he took for granted my interest in legal cases. He plunged right in.

"Oh," he said, "it all happened about eighteen years ago, in my home town. Margaret Shayne was an orphan, the ward of her father's younger brother, Timothy Shayne. At the time of the tragedy, Shayne was only twelve years older than she, thirty to her eighteen.

"His reputation in the town was none too savory. He drank heavily, and he was emotionally unstable, subject to sudden violent rages. But to give the devil his due, I'm sure he was genuinely fond of Margaret for he behaved well toward her, if to no one else. She was a plain little thing, but from the way he spoiled her, you would have thought she was a raving beauty."

For a moment I wondered fleetingly if I might have been mistaken in thinking Madeline was Margaret Shayne. It was hard to believe Madeline had ever been a "plain little thing," in Gordon's phrase. But still, strictly speaking, Madeline wasn't really beautiful, even today. Artful make-up, poise, clothes, and the glamor attaching to her profession might very well have created the illusion of beauty. Yes, I thought, my heart

sinking again, it was entirely possible that they were one and the same person.

"Well," Gordon was saying, "about a year before the time of which I'm speaking, Shayne went down alone to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras, and he married down there very suddenly and unexpectedly. When he came back he brought his bride, Clelie, with him. And there *was* a beauty! In two months half the men in town were in love with her, married woman or not. Shayne was insanely jealous, but nothing happened until young Jay Mortimer made a fool of himself with his attentions. Everyone could see it was entirely one-sided, that Clelie did her best to discourage him. Everyone, that is, except her husband.

"Shayne flew into one of his passions, and accused her of infidelity. A ridiculous charge, I'm sure. Clelie was merely an unwilling victim of her own attractiveness. But, frightened by Shayne's violence, she only whetted his suspicions by threatening to leave him. This threat brought on one last violent quarrel in the presence of Margaret. Shayne had been drinking heavily, and—well, you know what a combination of temper and alcohol can do. He said he'd kill her first. He pulled a gun on Clelie, and she struggled for it in self-defense. The gun went off, and Shayne was fatally wounded, dying minutes later."

"But," I pointed out here, "you said it reached a trial. Surely if she acted in self-defense—"

Gordon nodded. "You think she should never have been indicted? I think myself she would have been freed, for she had the sympathy of the town, at first. But this was *Clelie's* story, you see, that I've been repeating. And there was something else. There was the testimony of *Margaret* Shayne."

I stirred uneasily.

"Margaret told an entirely different tale," Gordon went on. "*She* said that Clelie shot Timothy Shayne in cold blood, that there hadn't been any quarrel or struggle at all."

"But even so," I objected, "it was only the word of one against the other."

Gordon shrugged. "Well, Margaret's story was sufficient to create a reasonable doubt. The prosecuting attorney was clever, and he made the most of it. What had Margaret to gain by a lie, he asked? Whereas Clelie had everything to gain. He was able to swing the jury away from the defense. They found Clelie Shayne guilty, and she was sentenced to prison for a term of years."

I felt swift relief, and a certain bewilderment. "Then she wasn't sentenced to death?" I'd expected to hear it.

Gordon was shrugging again. "Technically, no. But Clelie was a gentle, delicate person. I remember I was in court when she was sentenced. She just stood there dully, and when she turned away from the bench her eyes fell on Margaret. And there was the strangest look of bewildered despair on Clelie's face. I tell you, I think she died at that moment. She *did* die, actually, in prison five months later."

I asked, "And the girl, Margaret—?"

"She disappeared right after the trial. As I said, she dropped out of sight completely."

I said, "I see."

But I didn't see then. Not entirely. My thoughts were still too confused. I was anxious to be alone, in order to sort them out.

V

GOING home on the train, I looked blankly out of the dark window beside me, seeing nothing of what passed, my mind in a turmoil, my thoughts seeking this explanation, that one.

The legal profession is hardly conducive to the exercise of imagination, but I tried my best to reconstruct the story I'd just heard, to interpret it according to my suspicions and in the light of the weird things that had been happening to Madeline.

And I thought of that eighteen-year-old girl, Margaret Shayne—plain, petted, spoiled. Surely it followed that she'd been strongly attached to the young bachelor uncle who'd done the spoiling? And how had she felt later about his sudden marriage, his beautiful wife who was everything that she herself was not? Gordon had given me no clue. But it wouldn't be too fantastic, human nature being what it is, to assume that she'd bitterly resented Clelie, had bitterly resented being relegated to second place in her uncle's affections.

Her sense of possessiveness outraged, then, I could imagine this resentment—hid-

den, of necessity—growing like a cancer until it was of appalling proportions in the breast of this young girl.

And then the uncle's death. No matter that Timothy Shayne hadn't been all he might have been. He'd been devoted to her, at least, and it is easy for us to find excuses for those who approve highly of us. He'd been killed by the very woman whom Margaret had jealously resented—perhaps, had grown to hate. It took no great intelligence to suspect where her sympathies would lie. Certainly not with Clelie.

Suppose, then, Clelie *had* told the truth? And when it looked as if she might escape scot-free, Margaret, her mind twisted with grief, anguish, jealousy, had told her lie, sending Clelie to prison and death.

Had Margaret come to New York then to study for the stage and eventually become Madeline Ames? To be haunted eighteen years later by the ghost of Clelie Shayne, insisting that the true story be told at last?

Which brought me to the question: Did *I* believe in ghosts? Once I would have said, "Certainly not!"

But now—I didn't know.

Maybe I was being wildly imaginative. Maybe I was off on the wrong track altogether. I hoped I was. I hated to think that Madeline ever could have been guilty of sending another woman to her death. For the inference had been plain to be drawn from Gordon's story that it was imprisonment that had killed Clelie Shayne.

But if my surmises were true, why had the spirit of Clelie Shayne waited all these years for revenge? And then I remembered. Remembered Madeline saying she'd been happier than she'd ever been before. And that was why Clelie had come now—that her vengeance might bear a sharper sting.

For I knew one thing. If Madeline had done this, I could no longer go on living with her. For she would never again, in my mind, be the woman I had loved.

And so I had to know. And I determined to question Madeline now, tonight, telling her what I knew, what I suspected. And then I remembered "the truth wasn't in her." Suppose she only lied to me again?

How was I *ever* to know?

I had no premonition of disaster.

When I arrived at the theater, the cast was already on-stage, the amateurs among them looking self-conscious and ill-at-ease. Madeline's self-assurance and practised stage presence stood out like a light on a dark night.

She was looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her in a white crepe evening gown that clung to the long lines of her body. Her dark hair shimmered under the single naked light hanging above stage-center.

My heart was heavy with the knowledge of the talk I was going to have with her when we reached home. I dropped into a seat in the auditorium, next to old Mrs. Bronson, the Little Theater's guiding light.

She said, "Sh!" unnecessarily, for I hadn't been making any noise. "They're rehearsing the last act now."

The members of the cast were not as yet making any effort to give their lines dramatic interpretation. They held their "sides" and read from them matter-of-factly, occasionally stopping to ask Madeline for help on some mooted point, or to straighten out a bit of stage business. A young man sat at a piano in the pit, softly playing *Tangerine* for background music.

Madeline was in her element. As Karla Meath, the "heroine" of the play, a lady no better than she should be, Madeline had come now in the third act to taunt the wife of her lover with the fact that she was about to take him away from her entirely, and fly with him to *les Alpes Maritimes*. The wife, played woodenly enough by Mrs. Bronson's granddaughter, Alice, hysterically grabs a revolver and threatens Karla with it.

The scene went on through Madeline's brittle speech as Karla to the point where Alice picked up the revolver. She did it gingerly, holding it as if it were about to explode, an almost laughable expression of distaste on her face.

Madeline clapped her hands. The young man at the piano stopped playing, and Madeline stepped out of character long enough to smile and say, "No, no, Alice, darling! Don't hold the gun as if it were going to bite you! You're supposed to be frightening *me*."

The members of the cast chuckled, and Alice laughed, too, sheepishly. "I'm sorry, Miss Ames. I've always been afraid of these things."

Madeline nodded amiably. "Let's run through it again now. Background music, please, Mr. Carter."

Carter placed his hands on the keys. The open sheet music of *Tangerine*—the only music on the piano rack—was before him, and judging from the expression of bewilderment that slowly crept over his face now, that was what he was trying to play.

The others present apparently noticed nothing strange about this. But I saw Madeline shoot Carter a swift glance of surprise. She must have known at once, though. She must have seen that he was obviously dumbfounded to hear *My Blue Heaven,* when his fingers were playing the notes of *Tangerine!*

And then there was something else. I smelled it. The faint odor of carnations sweeping through the theater, weaving with the music a horrible web of enchantment, hideous to the two of us there who were aware of its true significance.

For Madeline had noticed it, too. I saw her grow pale till her lipstick was a red gash in her face. There was a moment when I could actually *feel* the sharp dismay that filled her.

Then her chin went up defiantly. I wonder now—did she know what was about to happen? Did she sense the climax near? Was she daring Clelie Shayne to do her worst?

Madeline's voice sounded taut and strange to my ears as she said sharply through the music, "Now, Alice. I come on and say so-and-so and so-and-so, and you whirl to the desk and grab the gun—"

I don't know why, but my heart was pounding, and I was sitting on the edge of my seat, watching breathlessly as Alice did as she was told.

But with the gun in her hand, Alice hesitated, and asked Madeline helplessly, "What had I better do now? Just sort of wave the gun, or—?"

And then Madeline said the thing that brought me to my feet, that made me try to cry "Stop!" through the anguish and swift presentiment that filled me. I was conscious of Mrs. Bronson staring at me in amazement as, dumb with sudden apprehension, my lips opened and closed soundlessly.

For Madeline said, "No, dear, point it at me and pull the trigger. *The gun isn't loaded.*"

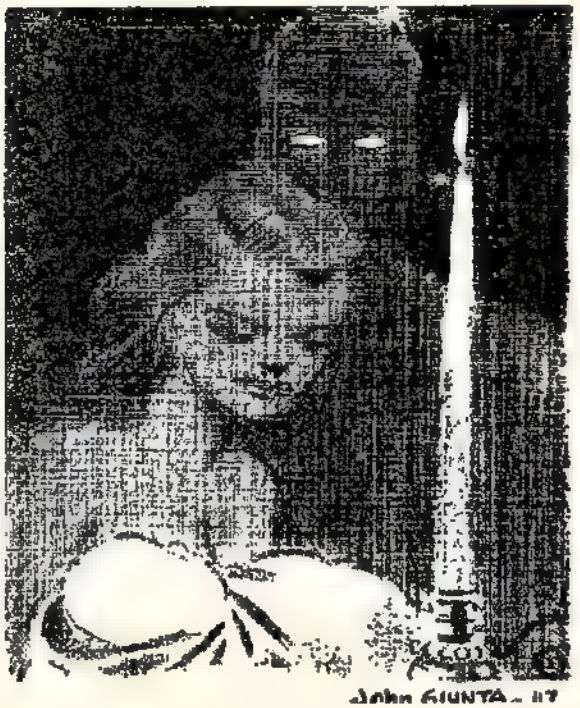
Alice obeyed, and as we all watched in helpless horror, the shot rang out, and we saw Madeline jerk, then sink to her feet, while a crimson stain spread slowly over the left breast of her white crepe gown.

As Clelie Shayne had predicted, as I had feared—

The truth hadn't been in her!

Demon Lover

By HARRIET A. BRADFIELD



GUARD your bride and watch her well,
Lest a creature, freed from hell,
Gaze upon her virgin face,
Seek her out with gruesome grace;
Cast a spell upon her heart,
Then with fiendish joy depart.

If she's felt the demon spell,
She must follow, though to hell;
Hear you call her, but too late,
Leaving you to tortured wait.
Hawk-like watch your lovely bride
Till she sleeps safe at your side.

WEIRDISMS

Drawings — Lee Brown Coye
Legend — E. Crosby Michel

THE **SABBAT** IS THE MEETING OF **WITCHES**, IN WHICH THEY GIVE THEMSELVES SOUL & BODY TO THE DEVIL DURING BLASPHEMOUS ORGIES OF FEASTING AND DANCING & MALEDICTION. DURING THE INQUISITION, THREE CLERICAL OFFICIALS ATTEMPTED TO SPY UPON A SABBAT - THE DEVIL PRETENDED IGNORANCE OF THEIR PRESENCE UNTIL THE END OF THE SATURNALIA - WHEN THE WITCHES SUDDENLY SET UPON THE PAPAL INTRUDERS AND BEAT THEM SO THAT THEY DIED WITHIN A FEW DAYS. HOWEVER NOT BEFORE THEY HAD DISCLOSED THE SECRETS OF THE SACRELIGIOUS REVELRIES.

Clay

BY C. HALL THOMPSON

I HAVE not been there since. I am not alone in this. It has come to my knowledge that all the doctors who once held residences in the Institution on the northern lip of Dunnesmouth, have quit the place never to return. It is not strange. Men who shared such memories were bound to run from the doomed house that spawned them. Wickford could not have stayed on, anymore than I; even that enthusiastic youngster of medicine, Fothering, was badly shaken by the hideous outcome of the case of Jeremy Bone. These men stood in the soundless chapel, and remembered mouldering death discovered in its dim alcoves; they passed the room once occupied by Jeremy Bone, and saw again the foul liquescent thing that rose from lost hells to defy the reasoning of normal minds. Is it a wonder that they left and did not go back?

But, others, who have never heard of the Curse of the Mark of Clay, have ventured once or twice into that ill-reputed region near Dunnesmouth. I have heard them speak of crumbling porticos and eaves sagged in, and boys from the village who come witch-hunting by night, tossing stones at the ghost of the moon in shattered windowpanes. They say the road is strangled with brambles and the wrought iron fence leans drunkenly inward; the gate is unhinged and rust has eaten at the brass plaque on the gatepost. But, if one dares come close enough, one may still read the name, Wickford House, and below it, in barren letters, the solitary word: ASYLUM.

In an earlier, happy time, Wickford House was quite different. There was no smell of musty documents hidden away in a teakwood case; there were no stains of clay on a swollen purple throat. The lawns were green and fresh with New England dew; the house was well-kept, with white porticos and green shutters and an air of gentle peace. Boys played at simple sports on the enclosed lawns; their faces were calm, unworried; white-coated attendants moved among them almost unnoticed. At times, even now, the memory of Doctor Gaunt's hearty laughter overshadows the horror of those later days. Peter Gaunt understood the "boys"; he could handle them as none else could. Even Wickford admitted that, under Gaunt's care, the boys never seemed what they were—inmates of an asylum for the insane.

Insane. Perhaps my use of that word is ill-advised. Of late, I cannot hear it spoken without experiencing a sickly mental shudder. It holds forbidding nuances that terrify me as they never could in the old days. It is a word I once thought I understood; today, I am not so sure. It was a word Peter Gaunt hated; a strange statement to make regarding a psychiatrist, is is not? Still, every aspect of this affair has been strange—horribly strange. Insane. Yes. That was the word Gaunt and Wickford were arguing over the night of the day Jeremy Bone came to Gaunt's ward.

We were finishing our brandy in the leathery seclusion of the library. It was a large room, high-ceilinged, with an antiquated, smoke-grimed fireplace. Booklined walls and velvet portieres drawn across the casements to shut out the whimper of the

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

Each dark, downward pathway of the mind is an adventure, dangerous . . . . deadly . . . .

rain gave it an air of snugness and peace. The boys were settled for the night in their dormitories; occasionally, a man in white passed along the darkened corridors. That was all. Even the shrill laughter of the boy called Trask, who had spells of hilarity in the loneliness of rainy nights, seemed distant and undisturbing. I dawdled over a volume of Stekel, not really reading; over the booktop, I studied Wickford.

FIRE light made his round face rounder and more ruddy. White hair rose from the massive forehead like a leonine mane. Wickford wiped pince-nez on an immaculate handkerchief. He was the portrait of a satisfied successful man of medicine; he had made his mark; in the realm of psychiatric research, the name Harrison Wickford was one to conjure with; his was a voice to listen to. At sixty-odd, the head of his own sanitarium, author of countless theses, calm, smiling, self-confident. His voice had adopted a sure, pedantic tone.

". . . All they require is care, patience, occasional restraint," he was telling Gaunt. "Keeping these in mind, it's easy enough to handle the insane. . . ."

Peter Gaunt winced, turning a weary smile on me. I smiled back.

One of Wickford's eyebrows arched petulantly; he didn't like the thought of being laughed at.

"I wasn't aware I'd said anything humorous. . . ."

"Insane." Gaunt stared at his brandy. "That word is so definite—hopeless. . . ."

Wickford shrugged. "Insanity is a very definite thing."

"Is it?" The bony head moved from side to side. "I'm not at all certain. Can we say definitely that a man is insane because he is unlike us—his mind functions a shade differently? The borderline between the sane and insane, between fact and fantasy, is too shadowy for any explicit delineation. Perhaps we have no right to brand these boys with the cold, irrevocable word, Insane; perhaps they are confused, frightened, pushed too close to that shadowline between to distinguish reality from fantasy. . . . But, then, at times, aren't we all . . . ?"

Wickford looked vague; his pink soft hand waved indefinitely. He laughed. "Bosh, my dear Gaunt! Sheer bosh! Why if that's how you look at it, there is no way of telling just where sanity ends and insanity begins; no way of being certain of your shadowing of 'fact and fantasy.' . . . How could we know exactly who is sane or insane . . . ?"

Dark eyes fastened on Wickford. Peter Gaunt gave him a sharp quizzical grin.

"Precisely," he said. "How?"

Wickford's mouth was a surprised "O." His eyes went blank, then he must have decided it was all a joke, for he laughed and jogged my elbow.

"I say, sometimes I do believe this Gaunt of ours belongs among the boys rather than the doctors. . . ."

The laugh got loud. I smiled politely. Gaunt smiled wearily.

Wickford changed the subject; he turned to Gaunt.

"Speaking of boys, have you seen the new one I had transferred to your ward today . . . ?"

"You mean Bone?" Gaunt nodded thoughtfully. "I've seen him."

There was a hollow tone to the words; they echoed in the silent room. A log-corpse sagged on the grate.

"Bone," Wickford said. "Yes, that's it. Jeremy Bone. Odd name, eh? Decidedly odd case, too. Seemed to be doing very poorly; no progress toward normalcy. Those delusions of persecution persist; he keeps talking of a person he calls Oliver, who tortures him. . . . I thought you might do something with him. You've a way with stubborn cases. . . ."

My curiosity was peaked. That was the first I'd heard of Jeremy Bone. I wish now I'd never heard the damnable sound of his name. But that night I felt no presentiment of horror; I felt only curiosity.

"Bone?" I leaned forward. "Who is he? What's his history . . . ?"

"That's right," Gaunt said. "I'd forgotten. You haven't seen him. . . ."

He lit his pipe and blew out the match.

"As Doctor Wickford said, it's a fascinating case. This Jeremy Bone is quite young—seventeen, I believe—and, to be quite truthful, we don't know a great deal about him. We do know he comes of very old New England stock; somewhere on the

heels of the *Mayflower*. . . . His mother died when he was born. According to newspaper stories, his father died just a year later, of what seemed depression over some secret tragedy no one has ever been able to fathom. . . ."

"And Jeremy?" I prompted.

"Raised by a maiden great-aunt," Wickford said. "Queer old duck, she was, by all accounts. Reared the boy in the utmost seclusion; no schools; no friends; only the musty rooms of an ancient gargoyle of a mansion. . . ."

Peter Gaunt stared at the glow of his pipebowl.

"I believe loneliness is one of the things wrong with the boy. And some torturing fear. The sort of fear that may have destroyed his father; terror of some strange thing in the past of his family, perhaps. . . ."

"Nonsense!" snapped Wickford. "Fear! Loneliness! Sounds like a melodrama. The boy is a plain and simple case of unbalance; melancholia bordering on depressive mania, due to this persecution complex. . . ."

"Words!" Gaunt rapped out his pipe with an impatient movement. "Words! Can they fathom the uneasy thoughts of a frightened mind like Jeremy Bone's? Can they allay his fears—fears that may be half-real . . . ?"

The laugh was mocking.

Wickford said: "Tell me, Gaunt; are you a doctor or a witch-hunter?"

IT was meant to be funny; somehow it fell flat. Rain cried against the windows. Trask's hollow laughter seemed to grow nearer and haunting; uneasiness crept into the room.

"To get back to the boy," Gaunt said quietly. "When his great-aunt died, the executors of the Bone estate, sent Jeremy to a school in Blackmoor. Reports say that the lad behaved oddly from the outset; was afraid and unwilling to go to Blackmoor; seemed to live in his own world with people of his own making. It was thought that the company of normal boys would improve him. It didn't. There are strange stories at Blackmoor of unsettled times after the coming of Jeremy Bone. Incidents, small, but decidedly unpleasant. The beheading of a school mascot, the neurotic talk of Jeremy's roommates about eerie things happening to the boy during the night. . . ."

"The school board was worried," Wickford cut in. "Naturally. Their reputation suffered; enrollment fell off. At that point, I was called in. I committed the boy. He spoke of nothing but this strange entity, named Oliver; a 'Thing' that forced him to 'do evil'; to maim—even kill. He kept repeating: 'Oliver wants me to destroy others as I destroyed him.' . . ."

The ruddy head shook; the pink lips pursed.

"Typical schizophrenia, of course. Split personality; the one good, the other bad—called Oliver—compelling him to commit crimes his normal self finds repulsive. I thought we might snap him out of it, but . . ."

Wickford raised hands palm-up. Peter Gaunt frowned.

"It's not as hopeless as that, Doctor. Bone has behaved very well since he came to my ward; seems to get on famously with that young fellow, Swan, in his dormitory. You'd think they were blood-brothers. Perhaps friendship is what Jeremy needs. With that, I may get at the root of his fear, find out exactly who Oliver is and what terrible meaning he has for the boy. Maybe, with such knowledge, I could cast out this hellish entity. . . ."

"Cast out;" Wickford echoed pompously. "You talk like a preacher exorcising evil spirits. Really, my dear Gaunt! We're not alchemists handling a case of possession!"

Peter Gaunt lifted one black peaked eyebrow.

He said, softly: "Aren't we?"

The words died. Firelight did a *danse macabre* in the far corners of the library. Then, abruptly, a high-pitched unhuman cry shrilled through the silence. Gaunt stiffened. Wickford paused, brandy-glass halfway to his lips. My mouth felt strangely dry when I spoke to Gaunt.

"That was from your ward."

Even as he nodded, it came again, the wail of a soul in torment rising from a bottomless abyss. Gaunt was on his feet. He turned to the door just as it burst open. Lowery, an attendant from Gaunt's ward, stood on the threshold; his face had an unwonted pallor.

"It's the Bone kid, Doctor. He's acting up something fierce. . . ."

The agonized scream sliced out anew. Lowery licked dry lips.

"You better come. . . ."

Gaunt had already started. Wickford and I followed hastily. The gray corridors seemed unusually chill and lonely. Ward "A" lay around the first bend. An excitement I could not quite account for tightened my scalp as we entered Bone's dormitory. The cry had dwindled to the whine of a terrified animal. The room was dark. A noisome stench sifted under the smell of antiseptic; an odor of decay that seemed to rise from the black corner by Jeremy Bone's cot. I was conscious of Gaunt's face, pale and taut. I followed his gaze to that corner. Against the wall, a phosphorescent nimbus seemed to hover like a bird of prey. As we watched, its edges bled and faded; slowly the amorphous mass became one with the dark, and a last unholy wail tore from the throat of the pitiful creature that cringed in the shadow of the cot. I stared at Jeremy Bone.

BOBBING frantically on its taut spindle of neck, the ponderous head made a grotesque contrast with the boy's frail body. The massive cranium and frontal bones dwindled to a weak, sparsely-bearded chin. Bulging eyes held a nameless terror the like of which I had never seen before. Spittle slavered from the lax mouth, and his huge hands, strangely covered with gray suede gloves, tore wildly at the nightgown's throat. Slowly, the cries subsided to an abject whine. He continued to stare fixedly at the spot where that ectoplasmic cloud had been. His lips worked. Coherent words came.

"Thank God! He's gone. He won't make me do it . . . not now. . . ."

The glazed eyes blinked and roved and focussed on Peter Gaunt.

"Doctor Gaunt!" He stumbled to his feet; the big head wobbled; he caught Gaunt's sleeve. "Don't let Oliver come back! Please! He'll make me do bad things. When you came he was talking to me, real soft in my ear, kill, kill! He wanted me to destroy Swan. . . ."

Wickford exploded: "Good Lord! Swan!"

Someone switched on the light; I turned to Wickford. Then, I saw Swan's fat limp form sprawled across the bed in the other corner. Wickford looked pale and worried as I tested the boy's pulse. He sighed relief when I said Swan was only sleeping. At that moment, the little eyes opened; Swan gave us his slow cretin's smile. I patted his arm.

"It's all right, son. Go back to sleep. . . ."

Jeremy Bone giggled hysterically.

"You see? I didn't hurt Swan. Oliver wanted me to, but I fought him. I was strong. . . ." Fear darkened the wide eyes again. "But, if I weaken . . . someday he'll make me . . . he'll say 'kill', and I'll obey. . . ."

"Bone." Peter Gaunt's voice was flat, gentle. "Listen to me, Bone. Oliver can't make you do anything you don't want to do. . . ."

The head shook wildly. Bone shrilled: "You don't know him. . . ."

"Listen, Bone. Only you can decide your actions. . . ."

"No. He can force me. You never read those papers in the chest. . . ."

Abruptly, his voice snapped off. His eyes flicked from one of us to the other. He tore free of Gaunt's grip, hissing, "The chest!" He scrambled on all-fours under the cot, let out a cry of satisfaction, and then crouched there in the corner, clutching in his bony arms a small, exquisitely-wrought teakwood chest. He was like an animal at bay, at once cunning and shot through with mortal terror.

I whispered to Wickford: "What's the chest?"

"Had it with him when he came. Went hysterical when we tried to take it away. . . . We humored him. . . ."

"He said something about papers . . ."

"Imagination. Thinks there are family papers in it; actually, it's empty. Examined it myself. All imagination. Like the fancy that he must always wear those silly gloves. Try as we may, we've never gotten him to take them off. . . ."

I stared at the abnormally large hands that clutched the teakwood casket. The frenzied eyes had shifted back to Gaunt.

"You don't know Oliver," Jeremy Bone intoned hoarsely. "He has a power; it's the secret of the chest. . . . You don't un-

derstand; you never heard of the Mark of Clay. Nobody knows about it, now. . . . Except me. Great-Aunt knew, and she kept me safe. She kept Oliver away from me. But now, he comes and whispers. . . . Kill, Jeremy, kill, *kill*!" The words splintered on a scream. "Keep him away! In the name of God, keep him away!"

PETER GAUNT caught the bony shoulders; tried to still the flailing arms. It was impossible. Saliva dribbled from Jeremy Bone's warped mouth; his eyes bulged horribly. In the end, it took three of us to hold him down. Gaunt shook his head, breathing heavily. "We'll have to use the needle. . . ." We did. The spasms died away gradually. Fleshless limbs relaxed.

Bone's eyes glazed with stupor. Once, he whimpered: "Keep him away. . . ." That was all. He slept. His gloved hands still held vise-like to the teakwood chest.

Under Gaunt's order, Lowery stood guard over Jeremy Bone throughout the remainder of that night. Silently, Wickford and Gaunt and I returned to the library. The room seemed cold and less friendly; perhaps the storm outside had grown more violent; the hiss of rain against the casements was a clear, lonely sound. I poured three fresh brandies. Gaunt took his glass without a word. I fancied that Wickford's plump hand trembled a little. He tried to keep his tone matter-of-fact.

"You see," he said to me. "Schizophrenia. Delusion of persecution by this—this 'Oliver'. . . . All part of a warped imagination. . . ."

He tossed off the drink hastily. He set down the glass and chafed his hands before the withering fire, as if they were unaccountably cold. For a time, Gaunt did not speak. Then:

"Imagination?" he echoed softly. "I'm not so sure. . . ."

His dark eyes searched a distant corner of the dim chamber; he was remembering that glowing, putrid mass that had died away in the darkness by Jeremy Bone's cot.

"I'm not so sure," he repeated in a slow puzzled way. "Maybe this fear, this sense of persecution has its roots in something all too real. . . ."

Wickford flushed; he covered uneasiness with bluster.

"I told you once, my dear fellow. We're doctors—not ghost-chasers!"

Gaunt nodded. "Perhaps. But, there are things even doctors have never nailed down with their scientific words. . . ." His voice was scarcely more than a murmur. "Evil things of lost aeons that linger at the edge of beyond, waiting an opportunity to return and haunt men. Unwilling—perhaps, afraid—to understand, to seek out these blasphemies and destroy them, we sidestep the issue by calling the men they haunt madmen. But, actually, are they mad . . .?"

Wickford's cheeks puffed out; something like, "Bosh!" pushed through fat lips. Peter Gaunt went on as if he had not heard.

"If I could get Bone to trust me, I might get to the roots of his mind. If I knew what he means by 'the Mark of Clay' and Oliver. . . . If I could become his friend. . . ."

"Friend!" Wickford rumbled. "To a schizoid bordering on homicidal mania?" He laughed shortly. "Mark my word, Doctor. If you're wise, you'll keep this Jeremy Bone under constant restraint. Friend, indeed! No one will ever be *his* friend!"

The room was quiet. Peter Gaunt only stared silently into the glow of the hearth. But his eyes were steady, thoughtful. I think I knew, even then, that he would prove Wickford was wrong.

He did.

I SAW very little of Peter Gaunt in the weeks that followed. For reasons which have nothing to do with this narrative, I was called away from Wickford House. Nor did I see Gaunt immediately on my return. But, I did hear a great deal about him. The story of his marvelous progress in the case of Jeremy Bone was rapidly assuming the proportions of an inspired legend among the resident doctors. Men talked endlessly over their coffee and cigars of how Jeremy Bone had grown calm, docile even—to all appearances, quite sane. After the first fortnight, injections had been abandoned as unnecessary. No longer did one hear Bone crying into the night his terror of the nemesis, Oliver. It was remarkable.

When I did run into Peter Gaunt, I was eager to question him about his success. I

wanted to know by what means he had gotten Jeremy Bone to stroll the twilit grounds in his company, as calm as a pensioner out for his evening constitutional. I wondered about the long afternoons he spent with Bone in the ancient Chapel that lay in the hollow South of Wickford House; I asked myself what charm the tolling, dissonant litanies Peter Gaunt coaxed from the organ's throat had upon the boy. But, my questions remained unanswered.

I confess at this point I was aware of a certain uneasiness that stirred in the back of my mind whenever I saw Peter Gaunt. He seemed, to me, thinner and oddly taciturn concerning a success of which he should have been justly proud. The hollows of his eyes had deepened and grown darker, and while he talked of Jeremy Bone to no one, it was obvious that the boy was constantly on his mind. He grew absent and more than a little short-tempered. I was worried. It was not until the afternoon we were summoned to his private study that I realized Wickford shared my concern.

He offered us tea and scones; he was jovial, boisterous. He was, patently, a man about to broach a delicate subject. Gaunt watched him with detached eyes. At length, with strained casualness, Wickford said it.

"By the way, my dear Gaunt, you'll be pleased to know I've arranged for you to leave on your long-delayed sabbatical, sometime next week. . . ."

Gaunt sat bolt upright; he looked as if he wondered if he had heard correctly. "But, I don't want . . . "

"Nonsense, old fellow!" Wickford forged ahead. You deserve a vacation. Been working hard . . . ah . . . perhaps a bit too hard, eh? You're not looking like your old self lately. . . ."

"I don't want a vacation," Gaunt cut in flatly. "I . . . I've cases to think of. I'm just beginning to get at the bottom of Jeremy Bone's trouble. To stop now might mean disaster. . . ."

"Fiddlesticks. . . ."

"Fiddlesticks, hell!" The voice cracked with nerves. "I tell you, I daren't leave that boy, now . . . I . . ."

"Doctor Gaunt!" Wickford snapped. "Must I remind you I'm running this Institution?" He looked at me. "It is my considered opinion that Lambert, here, can take over the Jeremy Bone case quite capably in your absence. . . ."

For a moment, Peter Gaunt only stared. I waited for another outburst. It did not come. His dark eyes shadowed; the shoulders seemed suddenly stooped. Then, without another word, he turned and left.

Perhaps I should have been insulted. But, I sensed that something much stronger than professional jealousy made Gaunt unwilling to relinquish the Bone case to me. An aura of fear of some impending doom had hung over his desperate argument with Wickford. I felt sorry for him. I wanted to reassure him; I thought perhaps I might even continue his method of treating Jeremy Bone, if I could get him to confide in me. But, when I found him alone in the library that night, he gave me nothing but detached civility.

I tried to draw him out. "I want to do my best, Gaunt. It might be well if I carried on your treatment. . . ."

He stared at his book. "No. Just care for him until I get back."

"But . . ."

The sudden black stoniness of his glance stopped me. His voice was hushed, level. "Listen to me, Lambert. You wouldn't care to know my method of treating Jeremy Bone. It's . . . well, not orthodox. When you cross the threshold, as I have, you learn things no man wants to know. . . ."

"But, I do want to know. If you've had such success, perhaps I . . ."

He closed the book sharply.

"Very well!" he snapped. "I'll tell you. I'm *believing* his hellish story. I'm facing his fears and trying to root out this devil, Oliver, that haunts him, by believing in it and destroying it!"

It was fantastic. It was some remnant of witchcraft rearing its loathsome head from the ruins of black sorcery. I could only stare as Peter Gaunt rose, laid his book on the reading table, and walked out. When my hands were steady enough, I poured a stiff drink. I needed it.

I cannot be certain what uneasy thoughts crawled through my brain in that instant. Perhaps I wondered if Peter Gaunt had, himself, crossed the fearful shadowline between sanity and madness. I daresay I had

some notion of telling Wickford that Gaunt's condition was more dangerous than we had guessed. But, slicing across my fear and doubt, there was the shrill whisper of curiosity. What if Gaunt was right? Suppose there *were* things beyond human ken; evil things that only people like Jeremy Bone could see and fear, and because of which they were branded lunatics. . . .

Curiosity won. I decided to investigate. The following morning I paid the first visit to my new patient. The corridors were dark and cold; fog sighed against tall casement windows.

My palms felt damp; a remembered echo of Peter Gaunt's voice slid through hollow stillness. I told myself Wickford was right; it was all nonsense. It didn't help; my scalp still crawled; my lips were still too dry. I opened the door to Jeremy Bone's dormitory.

THERE was a sharp rustle and then the snap of a minute lock. Jeremy sat in the windowseat with the carven teakwood casket on his knees. He had closed the lid abruptly as I entered. His eyes were narrow with cunning. The big sheathed hands clamped possessively over the chest.

I said quietly, "Hello, Jeremy."

The huge head tilted grotesquely. "Who are you?"

"You remember me. I'm your friend. . . . Doctor Lambert. . . ."

"No. . . ." The gloved fingers were clawed. "No one is my friend. No one believes me. Only Doctor Gaunt. He knows I'm not crazy. He's seen Oliver. Doctor Gaunt's my friend. . . ."

I sat down beside him; he cowered in the seat-corner. I tried for Gaunt's reassuring tone.

"We're all your friends, my boy. Remember that. I want to help you. Now that Doctor Gaunt is going away. . . ."

"Going away!" It was a raw scream; wariness gave way to sheer terror. "But . . . he *can't* leave me! He was helping me; he was keeping Oliver away. He understood and could fight Oliver. He *mustn't* go away, now!"

"Listen, Jeremy. I'm here to help you now. You must trust me. Tell me . . . how I can keep Oliver from you. You must be my friend. Like you were with Doctor Gaunt. . . . Like brothers. . . ."

Jeremy Bone sprang to his feet; a frantic screech clogged his throat. He clutched the teakwood chest to him; his head shook wildly.

"No! You shouldn't have said that! Not 'like brothers.' . . . Now Oliver will make me do it. . . . He doesn't want anyone to be my friend . . my brother. Now he'll force me to kill Doctor Gaunt! Don't you see? It's the Mark of Clay! Brother against brother . . . always . . . first Oliver . . . now Gaunt. . . . No, please! Don't let him whisper to me. I don't want to hurt Doctor Gaunt. . . . No! Stop him!"

I tried to calm him; my words fell on fear-deafened ears; the wild eyes worked; the mouth twisted; gray-sheathed hands were like convulsed talons. The screams ripped from his throat again and again. In the end, an attendant brought the needle. Even with that, it took Jeremy Bone a long time to sink into shallow troubled sleep.

I was a doctor; I had been trained in the hard doubting ways of science. A man like that finds it difficult to believe in the erratic babbling of a boy who has been committed to an asylum. I told myself the whole thing was absurd; the idea of a frail child like Jeremy Bone overpowering and killing a man the size of Gaunt was ridiculous. Still, all the rest of that day, a deep sense of failure and anxiety nagged me. I promised myself I would question Peter Gaunt in greater detail that evening; I had the feeling he knew more about this bizarre affair than he had told me. I never got to ask those questions. I was too late.

By the time I had finished my rounds, picked up some books at the Dunnesmouth post-office and returned to dine at Wickford House, Peter Gaunt was gone. I ate a solitary meal, wondering at his absence, and wandered, afterward, into the library. A couple of other residents were there, arguing a point on Freud. I inquired for Gaunt. No one had seen him since mid-morning. I shrugged, poured a drink and tried to get interested in one of the new books. Perhaps it was a subconscious sense of uneasiness that distracted me. It had begun to rain again. Despite the fire, the library seemed gray and alien. I decided I needed rest and retired

to my quarters early. I had closed the door behind me and lit a lamp before I spied the manila envelope just inside the sill. The note was brief, and written in a square, sure hand.

> Dear Lambert: I leave Jeremy in your care knowing you won't fail me. See that no harm comes to him, but I beg of you, ask no questions. Stay out of this affair. It is mine and must be left for my return.

It was signed simply: "Gaunt." I stared at it for a long moment, then sighed. After all, it was his case; it could wait until he came back. Came back. I frowned. For a man who had wanted no vacation, he had certainly gotten under way quickly. And without a word to anyone. Odd. . . . I put the note on my desk and began undressing. The knot of my tie seemed unusually stubborn. I looked at my hands in the mirror. They were trembling.

"Nonsense!" I said it aloud. The word sounded flat and brassy, like whistling in the dark. I repeated it more convincingly. I was getting upset over foolish trifles, taken in by the weird jabbering of an out-and-out schizoid. I had to get hold of myself. Everything was all right. . . . But even with the drapes drawn and electric heater going my sitting room seemed dark and filled with strange, restless thoughts. . . .

I MUST have dozed. My neck felt stiff with nodding in the easy-chair. I stirred. Somewhere, a door was open, because a damp draught swirled about my ankles. The sobbing of the storm had dwindled, but now, even before I opened my eyes, I was aware of a hoarse pulsing sound, murmuring from a spot very near to me. I sat quite still and stared. Inside the open door of my chamber, crouched and rain-soaked, stood Jeremy Bone.

My nerves tightened sharply. It cost an effort to keep my voice level.

"Well, Jeremy. Shouldn't you be in bed? It's past your time. . . ."

His thick breathing throbbed in the stillness. The pendulous lower lip quivered; his eyes had a look of blank, frozen horror. The sane timbre of his words gave me a start.

"Doctor Lambert, I want you to lock me up. . . ."

"Now, Jeremy. You wouldn't like that."

"You've got to lock me up," he droned. Oliver has won. I warned you he would, and he has. I've listened to him . . . and killed." A raw sob caught in his chest. "I've killed Doctor Gaunt. . . ."

I had started toward him; I came up short.

"You're wrong, my boy. You wouldn't hurt Doctor Gaunt. He's your friend. . . ."

"Yes. . . ." The bulbous head nodded dully. " . . . Like a brother. That's why I had to do it, you see. I had to obey Oliver, like it says in the Mark of Clay. . . . The chapel was so quiet . . . the organ crying, low and sad. . . . I didn't want to kill him. But, Oliver kept urging me. . . . His neck was soft and easy to snap . . . and then, those gray marks on the flesh, and the organ going sour, like a dying man's scream. . . ."

"Jeremy," I said steadily. "Listen to me. Doctor Gaunt has left on his vacation. In a little while, he'll be back. You didn't kill him. You're only a boy; Gaunt is a powerful man . . ."

"You don't know the strength of Oliver. . . . He speaks to me and my hands are like vises. . . ."

"Try to understand, boy. Doctor Gaunt left me a note. . . ."

"I wrote that note. . . . After I throttled him, I thought I wanted to escape. . . . Now, I know I can't. It'll always be somebody. . . . When he whispers, 'Kill,' I'll do his bidding. . . ."

I swallowed; my throat felt tight. It was growing more difficult to keep the words calm.

"Now, Jeremy, you're only upset because Doctor Gaunt has gone away. You need rest, and dry clothes. You shouldn't go out in the rain, Jeremy. . . ."

"You don't believe me!" Bone said sharply. The frantic terror was back in his eyes. "I tell you, I must be locked up. I killed Gaunt! There will be others. . . . It's the truth . . . in the secret drawer of the chest. . . . If you don't lock me up, I'll kill myself! I won't let Oliver torture me anymore! I swear it! I'll hang myself in the bell-tower! I'll . . ."

I had caught the fragile shoulders; Bone's arms flung out wildly. He screamed. That

was what brought Lowery. The attendant from Ward "A" sighed with relief at sight of the boy.

"Thank the Lord! We've been looking all over for him since noon. . . ."

He gripped Bone in powerful arms.

"All right, laddiebuck. Easy does it. No more of your running off and disappearing."

I said hoarsely: "You'd better use the sheets. . . ."

Lowery nodded; he and several others carried the floundering form from the room. Jeremy Bone's maniacal wail echoed back along the clammy corridors. "I'll kill myself! I warn you. . . . I didn't want to hurt Gaunt. There mustn't be anymore like him!" The words withered; I heard a heavy door clang shut. Then, only silence.

I turned back to my room. Tousled and bathrobed, Wickford filled the doorway.

"What the devil is this, Lambert . . .?"

Between sips of brandy, I told him. His cheeks puffed out.

"Absurd! Why, I've a note from Gaunt, saying he was leaving. . . . ."

"So have I. The boy claims he wrote it."

Wickford made a derisive sound.

"That's what comes of humoring their fantasies. Only makes them worse. . . ."

I gulped the last of the drink. "Then you think there's nothing to it? All this talk of the Mark of Clay and the teakwood chest? This story of murder . . .?"

"Fantasy," Wickford said. "Pure and simple. We must break the boy of these imaginative flights. Orthodox treatment; that's the answer. Gaunt's method was getting rather out-of-line. That's why I wanted you to take over. . . ."

"But . . ."

"No 'buts', my dear fellow. Take my word. It's all schizophrenic fantasy. . . ."

I wanted to believe him. It was the logical, safe answer. I watched Wickford pad off, yawning and self-satisfied, to his quarters, and wondered why I could not be as sure as he. I could still hear the shrill reverberations of Jeremy Bone's screams. I closed my door and locked it. Somewhere, outside, wind cried through naked branches. Even the quilted coverlet did not keep me from shivering. That night, I slept very poorly. A nameless apprehension lay like frozen fear at the pit of my stomach. But, the expected blow did not fall that night. Nothing happened until the following Saturday. Then, Fothering discovered the thing in the Chapel.

LIKE Peter Gaunt, young Fothering was something of an artist at the keyboard; their mutual interest in organ music had made them fast friends, and, between them, they supplied the tonal background during Sunday services at the Chapel. With Gaunt gone on vacation, it was only natural that Fothering should take over; only natural that he should go to the Chapel on Saturday evening to run through the selections he planned to render the next day. But, what he found crushed in the gloom and cobwebs behind the gilded organ-pipes was far from natural. It was a hulk of bone and clothes and slowly decomposing flesh. The eyes pushed wildly from their bluish sockets; the skin of the face had gone black. It seemed impossible that this putrid mass was all that was left of Peter Gaunt.

Cold sweat pocked Wickford's red face. He mopped it with a handkerchief. His fat mouth worked soundlessly. Fothering swayed; his face had lost all color; he turned away and retched. The thing on the floor grinned up at me hideously. I fought back nausea and stooped. Even in dim light filtered through stained-glass windows, I could see the purple puffiness of the throat. There were the marks of two thumbs on either side of the windpipe. They were gray and flaked away drily when my fingers brushed them. I felt words thick on my tongue.

"The Mark of Clay. . . ."

Wickford's breath caught on a snag; he tried to sound gruff, assured.

"Nonsense. You're on the wrong track, Lambert. That boy couldn't have done it. It doesn't make sense. . . ."

I stood erect. "It does, if you believe in Oliver. . . ."

Wickford only stared.

"Gaunt believed. He warned us the boy wasn't mad. He said Bone's fear had a real cause. . . ." Remembered words chanted in my head. "The secret of the chest . . . yes, Jeremy said that. . . . Perhaps the answer *is* in that cask. . . ."

"I tell you, it's impossible. . . . Why

should this boy want to murder Gaunt? . . . And how could he manage to strangle a grown man. . . ?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. But one thing is certain . . . Jeremy Bone can't be left loose. He tried to tell me there would be others . . . like Gaunt. We've got to restrain him . . . now, before it's too late. . . ."

I did not wait for more of Wickford's stubborn protests. I brushed past Fothering and out into the mist-clotted night. The journey across the grounds seemed endless. Behind, in its musty tower, the Chapel bell tolled with the shifting wind. Wickford puffed at my heels, cursing his foul luck. I hurried along the corridors toward Ward "A". My hands felt like ice; a numb chill fingered along my spine. Somehow, even before I tried it, I knew the door to Jeremy Bone's dormitory was locked.

Wickford blinked at me; the self-possession was gone; he waved plump hands. "Well, don't just stand there! Break it down!"

I lunged against the thick panels; something gave and splintered. The fourth thrust did it. The door slammed open and I plunged into the room. Moonglow bled on the pallid walls. In its corner, Jeremy Bone's cot was empty, its linen undisturbed. I started toward it. A low inane giggle brought me up short. I turned to find Swan sitting on the edge of his bed, smiling emptily at Wickford. The cretin's head lolled to one side. His voice was a sing-song keeping time with the distant carolling of the Chapel bell.

"Listen to the chimes, the chimes are ringing, ding, dong, ding. . . ."

"Swan," I said sharply. "Where's Bone? When did he leave?"

The pale eyes focussed on me.

"Ding, dong, Jeremy said you would come . . . He locked me in . . . No more Oliver . . . Ding, dong . . . no more Gaunts . . . the secret of the chest. . . .

"The chest," Wickford echoed in a toneless voice.

I snapped on the light and made for Jeremy Bone's cot; in the shadow beneath it, covered with a mildewed blanket, lay the teakwood casket. I drew it out; the lock was a simple affair. After a moment, the lid sprang open. I stared. The box was empty. A foul stench issued from it like a cloud of grave-dust. I fumbled anxiously.

"He said there were papers . . . something about a secret drawer. . . ."

ON the lid of the chest, carven in dark wood, there was a gorgonmask; my fingers brushed it; the head turned with a muffled click and, simultaneously, at the base of the casket, a shallow compartment slid into view. The sickly odor had grown overpowering; it seemed to rise from the tiny, leather-bound book that lay on the bottom of the hidden drawer. The jaundiced pages crackled at the touch. The print was archaic and minute. I read the title page. "Night Terrors by Bartholomew Humphrey, Being An Accurate Account Of Evidence Garnered By The Author & Concerning Veritable Case Histories Which Support The Theory That Hydras, Ghosts, Gorgons, Chimaeras And Such Night-Things Do Truly Exist."

The pages fluttered dustily; a clammy musk clung to my fingers. As if from habit, the book fell open at a place near its heart set off by a red velvet marker on which some Victorian hand had embroidered the name: "BONE." Wickford pressed closer, reading over my shoulder. The words of the heading crawled slimily across the page:

THE CURSE OF THE MARK OF CLAY

"According to certain obscure documents in the archives of the New English hamlet of Dunnesmouth, there dwelt in that town, in the year 1603, a woman named Hester Titus. Sprung from a family of ill-repute, much mistrusted because of her secretive ways and physical ugliness, Hester Titus was known to consort with one William Bone, a taciturn, sardonic individual suspected by more than one of black magic and unholy witchcraft. Tried for the kidnapping and murder of a young girl in the community, William Bone was found guilty and burned at the stake. As his vile oaths died in cries of agony, Hester Titus broke through the watching crowd screaming that they could never kill 'her husband,' for she bore in her the seed of his kind, and would hereafter give birth to the child of William Bone.

"In the ensuing months, this woman led a secret solitary existence, avoided by the

God-fearing folk of the Village. Only at the final moments of her accouchement was a midwife induced to attend her. This midwife afterward related a strange and terrible story. Hester Bone, in supreme agony, had given birth to *twins*. The one child, named Solon, strong and lusty with the saturnine look of his father even at birth; the other boy was born dead; curled in a pitiful ball, his tiny form was covered with bruises. Tears of blood stained his swollen cheeks. In the midwife's own words: 'God help us, it was as if Solon strangled his weaker brother to death, before they even saw the light of day!' And thus, Solon Bone was branded a prenatal murderer.

"Hester Bone reared her child in something approaching complete solitude. Witnesses who, in passing the decadent Bone farm, glimpsed the boy during his formative years, told yarns of his singular grotesqueness. Tremendous head, the body of a weakling, and the huge muscular hands of a powerful man: so they described Solon Bone. Swiftly, he became half-legendary in the bleak countryside of Dunnesmouth.

"Perhaps fifteen years after the birth of William Bone's son, the first of a series of peculiar local murders took place. The victim, a boy who had once or twice attempted to befriend Solon Bone, was found at the bottom of a dried-up cistern, his face bloated by strangulation, and on his throat, a series of gray dusty fingerprints that seemed like nothing but the mouldering clay from some ancient grave. It was not until the third monstrous crime had been committed that the citizens of Dunnesmouth rose in arms and decended on the Bone farmhouse.

"They found the body of the woman, Hester, crammed in the blackened fireplace. She had been throttled. A party of irate men cornered the boy in the attic; he babbled strange stories of how his twin haunted him, forcing him to kill others as he had killed that brother. His hands were those of the murderer, stained with the clay of death, and leaving their hellish mark on the throats of his victims. As Solon Bone spoke, he seemed to reach a frenzied pitch, until finally, pointing at a dim corner of the attic, he screamed: 'It's him! He wants me to kill again!'

"There are extant statements signed by witnesses to the horrible scene, to the effect that as the boy cried, there appeared in that dark corner a liquescent shining thing that slowly formed the twisted crying form of Solon Bone's twin brother. An instant later, when the boy dove for one of his captors, and caught the charge of a shotgun in the chest, that unnatural being faded and was gone, never to be seen again.

"Yet, this was not the last of the Mark of Clay. It would appear that through succeeding generations the family of Bone—as if damned by the godless practices of their ancestor—were cursed by the recurrence of these unholy twins. More than one successor of William Bone has caused the prenatal death of his brother, and throughout his hellish life, borne upon his murdering hands the foul stains of graveyard clay."

SILENCE enveloped the room like a pulsing membrane. I could hear Wickford's hoarse breathing. Across the grounds rolled the melancholy rhythm of the bell in the Chapel tower. Swan's head lolled back and forth, keeping time. He chanted idiotically:

"Ding, dong, hear the bell, ding, dong, ding, dong. . . ."

Wickford shook his shaggy mane.

"Impossible. The boy was a weakling; Gaunt was a man in the prime of life . . . alert, powerful. . . ."

He stopped short. His gaze had fallen on the teakwood chest. He bent and drew from the drawer a folded sheet of yellowed paper. He opened it and stared with widened eyes. The words were a dry croaking in his throat.

"Birth Certificate. County of Dunnesmouth. Born this day, December 13th, 1930, twin sons, to James and Letitia Bone. One boy was called Jeremy; the other, dead at birth, bore the name Oliver. . . ."

He blinked at me dully.

"But, I tell you, Lambert, it's fantastic! Sheer lunacy!"

I was not listening. Somehow, suddenly, all I could hear was the monotonous, "Ding-dong" that tolled from Swan's thick tongue. Somewhere at the back of my brain, a dark memory slithered into glaring light. An hysterical voice screeched: "I warn you! I

won't let him torture me anymore! No more Oliver. No more Gaunts. . . . I swear, I'll hang myself in the tower!"

I said: "Good Lord!" I spun toward the door.

Wickford blurted: "What the devil . . ."

"The belfry," I told him. "That's where he'll be! Don't you remember? What he said . . . ?"

The pink mouth fell open. By the time I reached the corridor, Wickford was pounding at my heels. I believe I have never since run as swiftly as I did that night. I stumbled. I heard Wickford cursing the brambles by the Chapel gate. Every throb of the bell was like a white-hot needle driven through my eardrums. I rushed through gloomy sanctuary, twisting behind the organ, into a tiny vestry. The door to the tower was ajar; the ladder was ancient and slimed with cobwebs. A cold draft slithered down the shaft. The trapdoor was open; now, the clangor of the bell was like slow thunder.

I halted abruptly; Wickford was right behind me. I didn't speak. I only pointed. In the darkest reach of the belfry tower, an eerie shifting brilliance slowly took on form. Curled at the heart of an amoebic oval, we saw a tiny naked child; its blind features, exquisitely wrought, were warped in ancient agony; blood-red teardrops stained the closed eyelids. The phosphorescence wavered and blurred; a wail, as of some defeated power of darkness, shrilled through the tower. The vision bled into surrounding night; at last, only a pinpoint of malevolent silver light gleamed. Then, nothing. The chapel bell tolled on.

WE found Jeremy Bone quite easily. Apparently, he had simply secured the hangrope to the crossbar of the bell, slipped the noose about his neck, and jumped into the black well of the tower. Without a word, Wickford and I drew him up to our level. I loosened the rope; the fragile body lay sprawled on the tower floor in a puddle of moonlight. The eyes bulged; the head was twisted at an ugly angle. The body was still warm, but Jeremy Bone was not breathing. His neck was broken.

Wickford sounded sick.

"I tell you, it's mad, Lambert. We're rational men of science. Not ghost-hunting old women. There must be a more logical answer. . . ."

"And that vision in the dark . . . ?"

"Mutual delusion . . . something we both *thought* we saw. Something we *expected* to see. . . ." The big head shook, staring down at the limp body. "No. I won't believe it. It's physically impossible! A mere boy strangle a man as strong as Gaunt? Nonsense! Why his hands wouldn't have been powerful enough. . . . Besides, he always wore those gloves; clean, gray gloves that would never leave the sort of stain we saw on Gaunt's throat. . . ."

"But, if he *took off* the gloves. . . ."

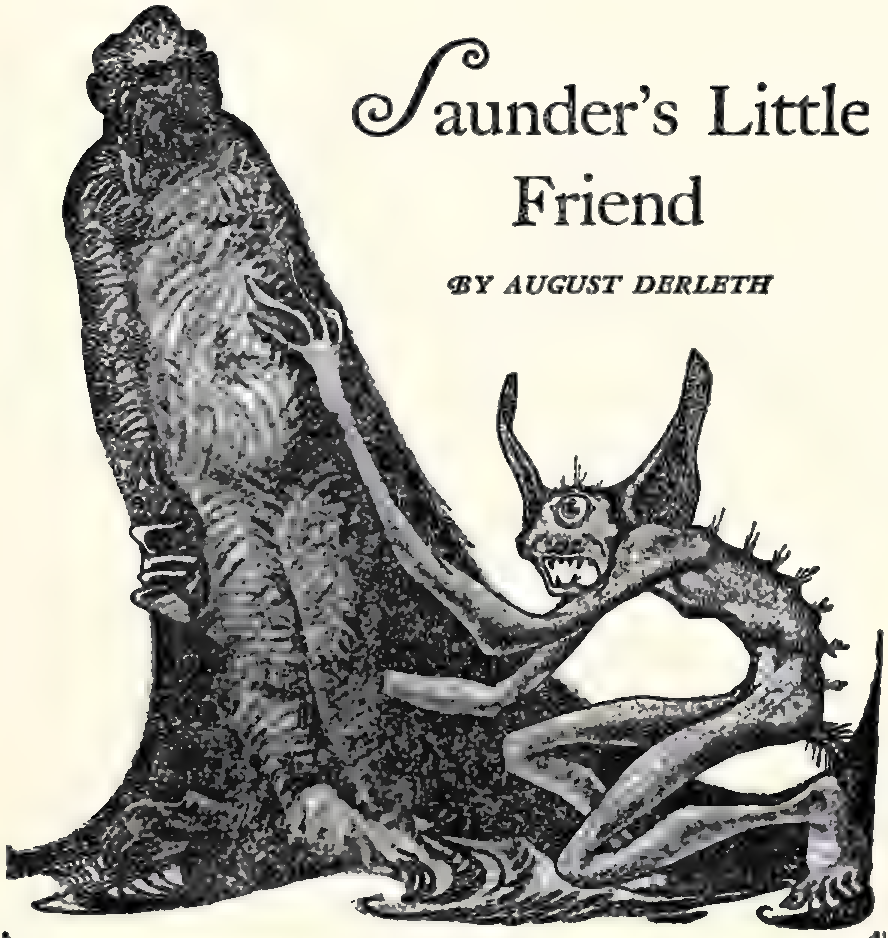
Wickford did not answer. The bell moaned a death-knell. We exchanged one more glance, then I knelt beside the corpse of Jeremy Bone. I unsnapped the wrist-button, and slowly peeled the glove from his clawed right hand. . . .

Now, in the quiet passage of days and nights that comprise my life as a general practitioner in a small town, there are moments when I might bring myself to believe it was all a hellish nightmare; that there is, indeed, a more "logical" explanation of the events which led to Peter Gaunt's death; or that Doctor Wickford retired because he wanted to, and not because he could never again be certain—not because he could never rid himself of Gaunt's quiet voice:. "Can we ever draw definitely the boundary line between sanity and insanity . . . ?" Pehaps I could tell myself that madness is a definable state, after all, and creatures like Jeremy Bone are truly insane, not merely pitiable beings who have seen beyond a veil that should never be drawn aside. I could rationalize; and, in the end, I might convince myself. But for one detail.

It will never be possible to explain away the thing I saw that night in the Chapel tower. As long as I live, I shall hear the mournful booming of the bell and see frosty moonlight shifting across Jeremy Bone's hand; that tremendous, sinewy hand of a man of prodigious strength; that hand whose gnarled fingers were coated with clay from the crumbling walls of an ancient grave.

Saunder's Little Friend

BY AUGUST DERLETH



. . . and everywhere that Saunder went, his "little friend" was sure to go. . .

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

FOR almost twenty years, Raneleigh Saunder had kept up a progressive feud with his one remaining relative, Aunt Agatha, who lived in a small house in Stepney to which he repaired from time to time from his furnished room near the Inner Temple, where he had a law office. Their feud was primarily about money, which Raneleigh seldom had, and Aunt Agatha did; and which Raneleigh felt he ought to share, being the only surviving relative in the Saunder line. It was somewhat disconcerting, therefore, to receive a note by the hand of a messenger from his aunt's only servant informing him that Aunt Agatha was very ill, was, in fact, dying—though not so much so as to preclude the possibility of his fleeting regret that there

would not be time perhaps for a parting shot at her parsimonious habits.

Nor was there. When he got to the house in Stepney, the blinds were drawn, and the house wore that patient, resigned air of death which instinctively caused him to assume a somewhat similar attitude of oppropriate dolefulness. The old servant was alone, and was in the act of packing her things.

Aunt Agatha had died and her body had been duly called for; by her own directions, she was to lie at the undertaker's only twenty-four hours, and then be buried. She had left a will, and there was no harm in telling Raneleigh what was in it; so the woman told him. He had been left his aunt's tidy little fortune, and only one condition attached to it; he was not to disturb her favorite room by so much as displacing a chair—which was tantamount to telling him that he must keep out of it altogether.

Nevertheless, however goaded he was, he maintained that air of obsequiousness so common to his profession in need.

"Poor Aunt Agatha," he said. "Her death was very sudden, then?"

"Yes, quite," said the woman. "As you might say, struck all of a heap. She was at work makin' something when I heard her call out. So I went to her, and there she lay. I got her up and on the couch in there, and she told me a few things—like to send for you—and that was all. When I came from the boy I gave the note for you to, she was dead. So I sent for the undertaker, and he took her off just before you came.

"I understand you've been taken care of," he said, though he understood nothing of the sort and would have been hard put to it if she had asked him to pay her wages, little as they were.

"Yes, sir, thank you," she replied. She gave him a slip of paper, explaining, "This here's my address if you should need to know about anything in the house."

"There's really no need to hurry off so," he protested.

"Miss Saunder's wishes, sir. I'm paid up, and I'm off, just exactly as she wished it."

He went through the house, very much aware, with that mixture of regret and relief which is all too human, of the absence of the old lady's acidulous voice. Much as he hated it, often as he had cringed under the lash of it, he missed it now that it was no longer here to be heard; indeed, he would not have minded hearing it a few times more, provided, of course, that he had had foreknowledge of her imminent end. He went through the house primarily to take a look at Aunt Agatha's room, and noticed with angry disgust that she *would* have chosen the best room in the house to leave behind untouched. It was the only room with a view, opening out upon a little walled garden, certainly not a common sight in this part of London; it was also the most agreeably lighted room, with old-fashioned windows in a kind of semi-circle at the far end of the room, just over the garden. And right there, at the windows, stood a table with what looked to have some kind of waxwork or clay-modeling on it—at which his aunt had no doubt been at work when she was stricken. What a mess! Last wish or no last wish, he had no intention of obeying Aunt Agatha's directive—unless, of course, he mentally reserved, she had the matter secured in her will.

AUNT AGATHA went to her grave in due course, and Raneleigh Saunder heard his Aunt Agatha's will read. It sounded very much like her; he could almost hear her tongue clack from time to time, though the illusion was spoiled by the droning voice of the ancient barrister who had had her will in safe-keeping. Raneleigh, who had manifestly some knowledge of legal matters himself, studied the will carefully and ascertained that no one would be likely to step forward and challenge his inheritance of her property if he chose ultimately to make such changes as he saw fit in his aunt's room.

"I shall have to come round every little while and look at the room, I suppose," said the barrister, Mr. Cumberland.

"Have you seen it since her death?"

"I'm sorry, but I've not had time to go over."

Saunder needed to know no more. He lost no time in going to his new home in Stepney; at least he could clear the table at the windows and put the room in something like order before Cumberland came to examine it. There would be nothing to show

that it had not been the way he, Saunder, would like it at the time of his aunt's death.

The table at the windows, however, arrested him.

It was covered with objects decidedly alien to his preconceived notions of his aunt's character. Clearly, the old lady had been modeling in clay. Some kind of figure lay partially completed near an ancient Latin tome, directions in which his aunt had apparently been following. The book, he determined at a hasty glance, was quite clearly a kind of work which he might expect to be utilized chiefly by crystal-gazers, professional magicians, and sleight-of-hand artists, to say nothing of those highly dubious old ladies who set up shop in tents at fairs and carnivals and pretended to tell fortunes and interpret dreams.

Just the same, the clay figure fascinated him.

He could not explain that fascination. Even though Cumberland had plainly indicated that he was in no hurry to come around and look the place over, Saunder did not want to waste any time in putting the room to rights; therefore, the fascination so instantly exercised by this incomplete clay figure was something for which it was not possible to account. It was so strong, in fact, that he found himself sitting down to it and actually taking it up, fingering it.

Oddly enough, the clay seemed still fresh; it was malleable under his fingers. He pressed and prodded it experimentally. Quite against his reason, he took up a crude ball of clay and added it to the incomplete figure, pushing at it and shaping it, not at all certain that he was adding to his aunt's conception, though he had an uneasy conviction that he *was* following whatever concept had been in her mind, and, a little late, he had the most extraordinary belief that he should not have touched the clay figure at all, that he should have followed the instructions Aunt Agatha had left him to the letter.

He worked with increasing swiftness, though he was now no longer conscious of Cumberland's impending visit. Under his fingers the figure began to shape up and assume an identity, though he could not put a name to it. When he looked at it at last, he was properly horrified. It was a repulsive thing—a cross between something not quite human, and something completely out of this world, but on the anthropoid side of creation, with a brushy tail and long, gangling, almost serpentine arms, and possessed, moreover, of a wickedly toothy mouth, inordinately wide, an ugly, flat head, one Cyclopean eye, and unusually large, elfin ears.

Saunder gazed at it incredulously for a long minute, his disgust mounting; then he dropped it to the table and fled precipitately, out of the room and down the narrow hall, ending up, unaccountably, in the kitchen, where he paused and pulled himself together.

"What an extraordinary thing!" he exclaimed.

It was almost as if the house had put a spell upon him! He shook himself, much in the manner of an animal, hawked once or twice, as if to be reassured by the noise, and then went back to the room with the view.

There he began methodically putting it in order, arranging things the way he felt he might like to see them, which was not, after all, too far out of the pattern his aunt had left—except for the table at the windows. This definitely had to come out of that place, and a comfortable chair put there instead, one which would enable him to enjoy the view when he chose to take his leisure—and this, thank Aunt Agatha for dying!—he could now do just about as often as he pleased. He left the table until last, however, so that his very real repugnance should have ample opportunity to subside.

But at last he returned to it.

His repugnance vanished before the discovery that the figure was nowhere in evidence. Apparently, in his haste to escape the aura of malevolence he had fancied he felt about it, he had dropped it and it had broken among the balls and crumbs of clay still lying there. He was too relieved to make any really careful examination of the table-top, but just swept everything together into the little chest his aunt had used for storage, put the chest away, folded up the table, and moved in a chair—and his rearrangement was complete. Now let Cumberland come!

That night in the house in Stepney was not his first.

It was, however, the first night he was to experience that extraordinary sensation of being not quite alone. It was, in fact, the beginning of a series of quite inexplicable events. That night by itself was extraordinary enough. He woke shortly after midnight, convinced that something had passed over his face. As he lay awake in the darkness, his room just faintly illumined by a street-lamp not too far away, he fancied that he heard something rustling about not far from his bed, the sound diminishing toward the door, which stood open to the hall—only a small sound, so that in a short time he was able to rationalize it and pigeonhole the entire episode as the work of mice. He resolved to obtain some traps and end this kind of nocturnal disturbance once and for all.

On the following day, he found it necessary to go to the Inner Temple. As he was coming up King's Bench Walk, a colleague in robes on his way to court, hailed him jovially.

They exchanged greetings.

"And who's your little friend?" asked Mentone.

At this point they came up to each other. "Eh? What friend?" asked Saunder, somewhat irritably.

"By Jove! I could have sworn you had a dog or a cat or a squirrel or something trailing you along. Pattern of sun and shadows, no doubt."

"Or old age," thought Saunder, grimacing and going on.

Poor Saunder! This was unfortunately only the beginning. When he went into a restaurant that noon, he was astounded to be accosted by the head-waiter, who informed him, with the air of proper severity so readily assumed by head-waiters who must go home every evening to be brow-beaten by wives, mothers, mothers-in-law, and/or landladies, that animals were not permitted inside.

"What animals!" exclaimed Saunder angrily.

"Sir, you had an animal—a creature," said the head-waiter stoutly.

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"Have a care, sir! I am in law. You accuse me of bringing an animal into this restaurant. I own none. Produce it, if you please."

The head-waiter looked haughtily around, but in a moment his hauteur crumpled, and a kind of exasperated desperation took its place. He mumbled something about "its" having got away "under a table," and finally excused himself and took himself off muttering sullenly under his breath that Saunder did indeed have an animal trailing him into the restaurant.

Throughout Saunder's meal, he saw the head-waiter watching him with studied intentness, and once he saw him making his way purposefully over toward his table, only to stop halfway there, bewildered, and turn around again. "What a peculiar fellow!" thought Saunder. "He ought to be committed." He made a mental note to look into the matter, time permitting, with that comfortable sense of security which arises in the knowledge that time would never permit that sort of excursion.

THENCEFORTH, Saunder was badgered at virtually every occasion.

Wherever he went, he was accosted by enquiries about his "pet," or his "little friend," or that "stray dog" which was following him around; he was tormented by wits who made jokes at the expense of creatures which were manifestly born wholly within that strange, unreal world of delirium tremens—which, for a reasonably abstemious man, was very trying; and, worst of all, he got so that he actually began to share the unbelievable fancies which seemed to obsess all his friends and acquaintances with such fiendish persistence and such remarkable unanimity. He reached that point in his existence approximately eight days after his meeting with Mentone at the Inner Temple.

It was in the evening, just as a yellow fog was beginning to haunt the streets near his home, that he thought he saw something following him on the rim of a street-lamp's glow. He turned at once, somewhat more quickly than he might otherwise have moved, had he not been goaded almost beyond endurance by the singular conspiracy against him manifested by the torment imposed upon him by his acquaintances. There was nothing, of course. Yet he could have sworn that he had seen something. Since there was nothing, however, it was clearly the result of all the jibes and insults he had taken acting upon his imagination.

Unfortunately, ever since that first night he had heard the mice in his bedroom, he had kept on hearing them. Though he had set traps in every conceivable place, he had not caught one. Nor had there shown any evidence of anything at all getting at the bait he had set out. More than just hearing the mice, he had felt them about his neck once or twice, and this was doubly disagreeable because, instead of something soft and warm and furry, they had been strangely cold and somewhat moist and not at all furry.

Saunder, who was not overly endowed with imagination, nevertheless was not so stupid as to decide at the end of ten days that his Aunt Agatha had left him a very dubious legacy indeed. He was loath to give up his house, but he had already begun to shun his acquaintances, even to the extent of avoiding his club; yet he could not forever endure the sport of those he met on familiar terms, nor could he long stand the peculiar hallucinations which afflicted him from time to time—among which those of seeing pursuing animals were not the least disturbing.

Quite by chance, he unearthed his aunt's clay-work chest one morning and discovered that someone had evidently been tampering with it. The clasp he had very distinctly pushed shut stood open. He took the chest up and lifted the cover, somewhat apprehensively.

Inside lay the ancient book of lore and legend which his aunt had used. With a prickling of his scalp, he saw that something more lay there—certainly something more than he remembered having put there. The clay, which he had put into the chest in loose crumbs and crude balls, had somehow shaped itself into a vague semblance of a human being. He stared at it for some time, incredulous. He thought at first that the clay had somehow rolled together, but no, the clay was compact, quite as if it had been molded.

Somewhat gingerly, he brought the chest

closer to his eyes, so that he might the better examine that strange, unaccountable sculpture. All over the tiny figure were such marks as might have been made by very small fingers and hands. A little shaken, he put the chest down and took out the book.

He opened it at random, read a little, and tried again.

AFTER dipping into it here and there, he was more mystified than ever. The book was a compendium of all manner of superstitions, lore, legend, omens and the like; there were apparently also ancient Druidic runes, curious recipes (calling for the "blood of a new-born babe," of all things!), and similar outlandish things. Saunder was not sure, but he suspected that quite possibly this ancient tome was proscribed by canon law.

A further examination indicated that it had been bought at Mr. Chandos's shop in Soho, and, after milling over the chest and its contents, it was to this shop that Saunder ultimately repaired, late that afternoon.

Mr. Chandos was, just as Saunder had suspected he might be, an Oriental, very probably from India, though Saunder was not sufficiently versed in the nationalities to be sure. He was very old, and not particularly communicative, though he was affable enough.

Yes, he had sold to an elderly lady such a book as Saunder described.

"I am unable to understand the purpose of the book," said Saunder, discarding his initial plan to make a frontal attack by representing himself as a barrister on the track of law-breaking.

Mr. Chandos shrugged. The book was nothing, he explained. Only a harmless collection. "Curiosa," he said.

"Yes, indeed, it is curious," admitted Saunder. "But what would an elderly lady such as my late aunt be doing with clay figures in connection with it?"

Mr. Chandos's eyes twinkled. He hissed politely. Perhaps the lady was attempting to make a wax image for the purpose of bewitching someone, Mr. Chandos explained. The clay very probably contained some portion of the body of her intended victim, and was intended to be destroyed in some manner. Such destruction would then inevitably—if one were to believe in such a rigamarole—result in the death of the victim. Mr. Chandos shrugged eloquently, as much as to say that, of course, if one were so medieval as to believe in this sort of thing, there was no good in saying more.

Saunder was therefore nimbly put off, half-informed. Nevertheless, he had his suspicions. He had long suspected that Aunt Agatha would not have minded in the least if he had shuffled off this mortal coil before her; indeed, she had even included such a provision in her will, indicating that if he predeceased her, her small fortune was to go to a home for homeless animals.

As he went out, Saunder was unpleasantly stopped short by Mr. Chandos's calling after him not to leave his "pet" behind.

Saunder swallowed determinedly and came back to the much-cluttered counter.

"Would you be so kind as to describe my pet?" he asked.

Mr. Chandos looked at him for a moment with intent blandness. "A small creature—like a monkey, with long arms, pointed ears, and a bushy tail. The head, I think, is flat."

Saunder turned on his heel and went out. He went home growing more upset with every step.

He sat for some time that evening turning Mr. Chandos's description of his pet over in his mind. There was no possible way of escaping recognition of the fact that Mr. Chandos's description precisely fitted the repulsive clay image he had so strangely fashioned when he had sat down at his aunt's table before the windows!

But such a thing manifestly could not be. Saunder had progressed beyond the point of turning to his law books for confirmation of his beliefs, but he had not yet got to that stage at which he could readily accept something beyond the pale of both the probable and the possible. That a clay image could somehow be imbued with life at his hands was inconceivable—particularly such a ghastly travesty as the thing which had so repelled him.

Just the same, Saunder did not propose to take any chances. He began systematically to watch for things out of the corners of his eyes. The result of this was that he had more hallucinations than ever.

Or were they hallucinations?

Saunder wondered. Saunder lost weight. More than once, Saunder reminded himself that he ought to have heeded his aunt's admonitions regarding the room with the view.

He bethought himself finally of the "mice" he had heard, and of that feeling of "mice" at his neck which was so much more like the feeling of a clay image than like that of mice.

ACCORDINGLY, he lost sleep. In the confusion of his thoughts, he reasoned that somehow, inexplicably, his Aunt Agatha had set a trap for him. He had fallen into it, according to plan. He had not the faintest idea of what might happen next, but, knowing how the old lady had been in her bad moments, he could not view his future with much hope.

Three nights after his visit to Mr. Chandos's strange shop in Soho, Saunder heard the scampering sound he had previously associated with mice. He had been lying on his bed, trying vainly to sleep, and, hearing those padding footsteps scuttling past, he got up at once, lit the lamp, and held it high.

Nothing in sight. Nothing to be heard.

But wait—the sound continued, not from within the room.

Saunder stepped into the hall. He paused. The sound came from nearby. He went along the hall, down the stairs. The sound diminished, rose up, diminished again. He traced it, finally, to the room with the view —Aunt Agatha's room, which he had better never have entered.

Now, resolute and angrily determined, despite the chill apprehension he felt, Saunder stood in the middle of the room and listened. There were still coals in the fireplace; he threw on more fuel, so that the flames danced brightly to add their light to that of his lamp.

The sound of tiny hands or feet, of a dragging brush, continued unabated from somewhere within the room. He began to turn over chairs in a feverish heat to find the clay image, not forgetting to close the door so that whatever was in the room with him could not escape.

In the midst of his search, he thought of the chest.

He went directly to it, and with each step he took it seemed to him that the scraping and patting sounds grew more pronounced. He picked up the chest, observing that the hasp had once again become undone. Swallowing hard, he lifted the cover.

And there it was—that ghastly clay thing his own hands had fashioned under a compulsion certainly not his own — crouched there in the recess of that chest animated by an unholy force, working rapidly over another image wrought out of what remained of that clay!

Saunder stood for one shocked moment looking at something his senses recognized but his mind denied. He saw that horrible creature's animation, he recognized the figure being shaped so unbelievably by those awkward clay hands at the end of those gangling clay arms as that of a man—then, with a cry of revulsion, he seized both the clay things in the chest and hurled them into the flames on the hearth.

It was unfortunate that Saunder did not take the time to examine the figure of the man more closely; he might then have recognized that it was, however crude, an image of himself.

The flames licked up and enveloped the clay figures.

Saunder dropped the chest and clawed at his throat. He fell back against the table and collapsed on the floor, completely oblivious of the lamp he knocked over. He felt for one cataclysmic moment as if all the coals on the hearth had come alive inside him.

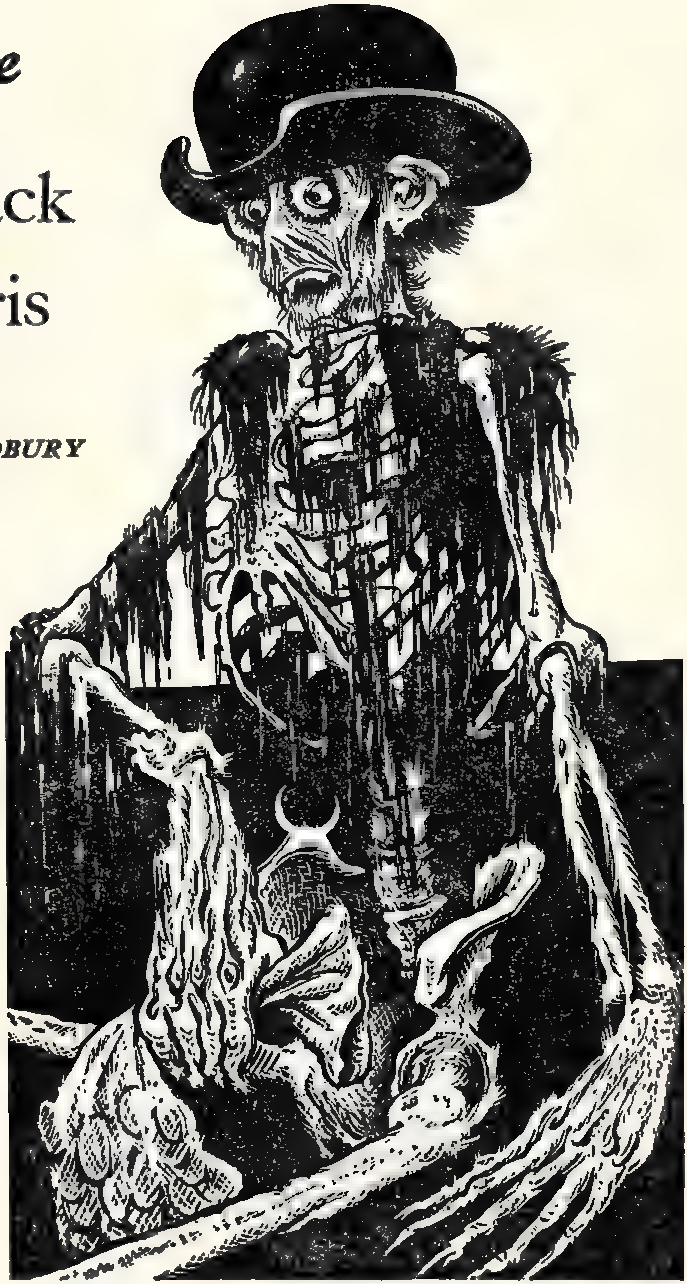
The house was partially destroyed before what was left of Saunder was dragged out of it.

At that, commented the coroner at the inquest, he had not been too badly burned. It was, however, entirely extraordinary that he should have been burned so badly *on the inside*.

The Black Ferris

BY
RAY BRADBURY

Time is irreversible
—or is it?



Heading by
LEE BROWN
COYE

THE carnival had come to town like an October wind, like a dark bat flying over the cold lake, bones rattling in the night, mourning, sighing, whispering up the tents in the dark rain. It stayed on for a month by the gray, restless lake of October, in the black weather and increasing storms and leaden skies.

During the third week, at twilight on a Thursday, the two small boys walked along the lake shore in the cold wind.

"Aw, I don't believe you," said Peter.

"Come on, and I'll show you," said Hank.

They left wads of spit behind them all along the moist brown sand of the crashing shore. They ran to the lonely carnival grounds. It had been raining. The carnival lay by the sounding lake with nobody buying tickets from the flaky black booths, nobody hoping to get the salted hams from the whining roulette wheels, and none of the thin-fat freaks on the big platforms. The midway was silent; all the gray tents hissing on the wind like gigantic prehistoric wings. At eight o'clock perhaps, ghastly lights would flash on, voices would shout, music would go out over the lake. Now there was only a blind hunchback sitting on a black booth, feeling of the cracked china cup from which he was drinking some perfumed brew.

"There," said Hank, pointing.

The black Ferris wheel rose like an immense light-bulbed constellation against the cloudy sky, silent.

"I still don't believe what you said about it," said Peter.

"You wait, I saw it happen. I don't know how, but it did. You know how carnivals are; all funny. Okay; this one's even *funnier.*"

Peter let himself be led to the high green hiding place of a tree.

Suddenly, Hank stiffened. "*Hist!* There's Mr. Cooger, the carnival man, now!" Hidden, they watched.

Mr. Cooger, a man of some thirty-five years, dressed in sharp bright clothes, a lapel carnation, hair greased with oil, drifted under the tree, a brown derby hat on his head. He had arrived in town three weeks before, shaking his brown derby hat at people on the street from inside his shiny red Ford, tooting the horn.

Now Mr. Cooger nodded at the little blind hunchback, spoke a word. The hunchback blindly, fumbling, locked Mr. Cooger into a black seat and sent him whirling up into the ominous twilight sky. Machinery hummed.

"See!" whispered Hank. "The Ferris wheel's going the wrong way. Backwards instead of forwards!"

"So what?" said Peter.

"Watch!"

The black Ferris wheel whirled twenty-five times around. Then the blind hunchback put out his pale hands and halted the machinery. The Ferris wheel stopped, gently swaying, at a certain black seat.

A ten-year-old boy stepped out. He walked off across the whispering carnival ground, in the shadows.

Peter almost fell from his limb. He searched the Ferris wheel with his eyes. "Where's Mr. Cooger!"

Hank poked him. "You wouldn't believe! Now *see*!"

"Where's Mr. Cooger at!"

"Come on, quick, run!" Hank dropped and was sprinting before he hit the ground.

UNDER giant chestnut trees, next to the ravine, the lights were burning in Mrs. Foley's white mansion. Piano music tinkled. Within the warm windows, people moved. Outside, it began to rain, despondently, irrevocably, forever and ever.

"I'm *so* wet," grieved Peter, crouching in the bushes. "Like someone squirted me with a hose. How much longer do we wait?"

"Sh!" said Hank, cloaked in wet mystery.

They had followed the little boy from the Ferris wheel up through town, down dark streets to Mrs. Foley's ravine house. Now, inside the warm dining room of the house the strange little boy sat at dinner, forking and spooning rich lamb chops and mashed potatoes.

"I know his name," whispered Hank, quickly. "My Mom told me about him the other day. She said, 'Hank, you hear about the li'l orphan boy moved in Mrs. Foley's? Well, his name is Joseph Pikes and he just came to Mrs. Foley's one day about two weeks ago and said how he was an orphan run away and could he have something to eat, and him and Mrs. Foley been getting on like hot apple pie ever since.' That's what my Mom said," finished Hank, peering

through the steamy Foley window. Water dripped from his nose. He held onto Peter who was twitching with cold. "Pete, I didn't like his looks from the first, I didn't. He looked—mean."

"I'm scared," said Peter, frankly wailing. "I'm cold and hungry and I don't know what this's all about."

"Gosh, you're dumb!" Hank shook his head, eyes shut in disgust. "Don't you see, three weeks ago the carnival came. And about the same time this little ole orphan shows up at Mrs. Foley's. And Mrs. Foley's son died a long time ago one night one winter, and she's never been the same, so here's this little ole orphan boy who butters her all around."

"Oh," said Peter, shaking.

"Come on," said Hank. They marched to the front door and banged the lion knocker.

After awhile the door opened and Mrs. Foley looked out.

"You're all wet, come in," she said. "My land," she herded them into the hall. "What do you want?" she said, bending over them, a tall lady with lace on her full bosom and a pale thin face with white hair over it. "You're Henry Walterson, aren't you?"

Hank nodded, glancing fearfully at the dining room where the strange little boy looked up from his eating. "Can we see you alone, ma'm?" And when the old lady looked palely surprised, Hank crept over and shut the hall door and whispered at her. "We got to warn you about something, it's about that boy come to live with you, that orphan?"

The hall grew suddenly cold. Mrs. Foley drew herself high and stiff. "Well?"

"He's from the carnival, and he ain't a boy, he's a man, and he's planning on living here with you until he finds where your money is and then run off with it some night, and people will look for him but because they'll be looking for a little ten-year-old boy they won't recognize him when he walks by a thirty-five year man, named Mr. Cooger!" cried Hank.

"What *are* you talking about?" declared Mrs. Foley.

"The carnival and the Ferris wheel and this strange man Mr. Cooger, the Ferris wheel going backward and making him younger, I don't know how, and him coming here as a boy, and you can't trust him, because when he has your money he'll get on the Ferris wheel and it'll go *forward*, and he'll be thirty-five years old again, and the boy'll be gone forever!"

"Goodnight, Henry Walterson, don't *ever* come back!" shouted Mrs. Foley.

The door slammed. Peter and Hank found themselves in the rain once more. It soaked into and into them, cold and complete.

"Smart guy," snorted Peter. "Now you fixed it. Suppose he heard us, suppose he comes and *kills* us in our beds tonight, to shut us all up for keeps!"

"He wouldn't do that," said Hank.

"Wouldn't he?" Peter seized Hank's arm. "Look."

In the big bay window of the dining room now the mesh curtain pulled aside. Standing there in the pink light, his hand made into a menacing fist, was the little orphan boy. His face was horrible to see, the teeth bared, the eyes hateful, the lips mouthing out terrible words. That was all. The orphan boy was there only a second, then gone. The curtain fell into place. The rain poured down upon the house. Hank and Peter walked slowly home in the storm.

DURING supper, Father looked at Hank and said, "If you don't catch pneumonia, I'll be surprised. Soaked, you were, by God! What's this about the carnival?"

Hank fussed at his mashed potatoes, occasionally looking at the rattling windows. "You know Mr. Cooger, the carnival man, Dad?"

"The one with the pink carnation in his lapel?" asked Father.

"Yes!" Hank sat up. "You've seen him around?"

"He stays down the street at Mrs. O'Leary's boarding house, got a room in back. Why?"

"Nothing," said Hank, his face glowing.

After supper Hank put through a call to Peter on the phone. At the other end of the line, Peter sounded miserable with coughing.

"Listen, Pete!" said Hank. "I see it all now. When that li'l ole orphan boy, Joseph Pikes, gets Mrs. Foley's money, he's got a good plan."

"What?"

"He'll stick around town as the carnival man, living in a room at Mrs. O'Leary's. That way nobody'll get suspicious of him. Everybody'll be looking for that nasty little boy and he'll be gone. And he'll be walking around, all disguised as the carnival man. That way, nobody'll suspect the carnival at all. It would look funny if the carnival suddenly pulled up stakes."

"Oh," said Peter, sniffling.

"So we got to act fast," said Hank.

"Nobody'll believe us, I tried to tell my folks but they said hogwash!" moaned Peter.

"We got to act tonight, anyway. Because why? Because he's gonna try to kill us! We're the only ones that know and if we tell the police to keep an eye on him, he's the one who stole Mrs. Foley's money in cahoots with the orphan boy, he won't live peaceful. I bet he just tries something tonight. So, I tell you, meet me at Mrs. Foley's in half-an-hour."

"Aw," said Peter.

"You wanna die?"

"No." Thoughtfully.

"Well, then. Meet me there and I bet we see that orphan boy sneaking out with the money, tonight, and running back down to the carnival grounds with it, when Mrs. Foley's asleep. I'll see you there. So long, Pete!"

"Young man," said Father, standing behind him as he hung up the phone. "You're not going anywhere. You're going straight up to bed. Here." He marched Hank upstairs. "Now, hand me out every thing you got on." Hank undressed. "There're no other clothes in your room are there?" asked Father. "No, sir, they're all in the hall closet," said Hank, disconsolately.

"Good," said Dad and shut and locked the door.

Hank stood there, naked. "Holy Cow," he said.

"Go to bed," said Father.

PETER arrived at Mrs. Foley's house at about nine-thirty, sneezing, lost in a vast raincoat and mariner's cap. He stood like a small water hydrant on the street, mourning softly over his fate. The lights in the Foley house were warmly on upstairs. Peter waited for half-an-hour, looking at the rain-drenched slick streets of night.

Finally there was a darting paleness, a rustle in wet bushes.

"Hank?" Peter questioned the bushes.

"Yeah." Hank stepped out.

"Gosh," said Peter, staring. "You're—you're *naked*!"

"I ran all the way," said Hank. "Dad wouldn't let me out."

"You'll get pneumonia," said Peter.

The lights in the house went out.

"Duck," cried Hank, bounding behind some bushes. They waited. "Pete," said Hank. "You're wearing pants, aren't you?"

"Sure," said Pete.

"Well, you're wearing a raincoat, and nobody'll know, so lend me your pants," asked Hank.

A reluctant transaction was made. Hank pulled the pants on.

The rain let up. The clouds began to break apart.

In about ten minutes a small figure emerged from the house; bearing a large paper sack filled with some enormous loot or other.

"There he is," whispered Hank.

"There he goes!" cried Peter.

The orphan boy ran swiftly.

"Get after him!" cried Hank.

They gave chase through the chestnut trees, but the orphan boy was swift, up the hill, through the night streets of town, down past the rail yards, past the factories, to the midway of the deserted carnival. Hank and Peter were poor seconds, Peter weighted as he was with the heavy raincoat, and Hank frozen with cold. The thumping of Hank's bare feet sounded through the town.

"Hurry, Pete! We can't let him get to that Ferris wheel before we do, if he changes back into a man we'll never prove anything!"

"I'm hurrying!" But Pete was left behind as Hank thudded on alone in the clearing weather.

"Yah!" mocked the orphan boy, darting away, no more than a shadow ahead, now. Now vanishing into the carnival yard.

Hank stopped at the edge of the carnival lot. The Ferris wheel was going up and up into the sky, a big nebula of stars caught

on the dark earth and turning forward and forward, instead of backward, and there sat Joseph Pikes in a green painted bucket-seat, laughing up and around and down and up and around and down at little old Hank standing there, and the little blind hunchback had his hand on the roaring, oily black machine that made the Ferris wheel go ahead and ahead. The midway was deserted because of the rain. The merry-go-round was still, but its music played and crashed in the open spaces. And Joseph Pikes rode up into the cloudy sky and came down and each time he went around he was a year older, his laughing changed, grew deep, his face changed, the bones of it, the mean eyes of it, the wild hair of it, sitting there is the green bucket seat whirling, whirling swiftly, laughing into the bleak heavens where now and again a last split of lightning showed itself.

Hank ran forward at the hunchback by the machine. On the way he picked up a tent spike. "Here now!" yelled the hunchback. The black Ferris wheel whirled around. "You!" stormed the hunchback, fumbling out. Hank hit him in the kneecap and danced away. "Ouch!" screamed the man, falling forward. He tried to reach the machine brake to stop the Ferris wheel. When he put his hand on the brake, Hank ran in and slammed the tent spike against the fingers, mashing them. He hit them twice. The man held his hand in his other hand, howling. He kicked at Hank. Hank grabbed the foot, pulled, the man slipped in the mud and fell. Hank hit him on the other knee, hard. Hank hit him on the head, shouting.

The Ferris wheel went around and around and around.

"Stop, stop the wheel!" cried Joseph Pikes-Mr. Cooger flung up in a stormy cold sky in the bubbled constellation of whirl and rush and wind.

"I can't move," groaned the hunchback. Hank jumped on his chest and they thrashed, biting, kicking.

"Stop, stop the wheel!" cried Mr. Cooger, a man, a different man and voice this time, coming around in panic, going up into the roaring hissing sky of the Ferris wheel. The wind blew through the high dark wheel spokes. "Stop, stop, oh please stop the wheel!"

HANK leaped up from the sprawled hunchback. He started in on the brake mechanism, hitting it, jamming it, putting hunks of metal in it, tying it with rope, now and again hitting at the crawling weeping dwarf.

"Stop, stop, stop the wheel!" wailed a voice high in the night where the windy moon was coming out of the vaporous white clouds now. "Stop . . ." The voice faded.

Now the carnival was ablaze with sudden light. Men sprang out of tents, came running. Hank felt himself jerked into the air with oaths and beatings rained on him. Terrible faces leered and gaped at him. From a distance there was a sound of Peter's voice and behind Peter, at full tilt, a police officer with pistol drawn.

"Stop, stop the wheel!" In the wind the voice sighed away.

The voice repeated and repeated.

The dark carnival men tried to apply the brake. Nothing happened. The machine hummed and turned the wheel around and around. The mechanism was jammed.

"Stop!" cried the voice one last time.

Silence.

Without a word the Ferris wheel flew in a circle, a high system of electric stars and metal and seats. There was no sound now but the sound of the motor which died and stopped. The Ferris wheel coasted for a minute, all the carnival people looking up at it, the policeman looking up at it, Hank and Peter looking up at it.

The Ferris wheel stopped. A crowd had gathered at the noise. A few fishermen from the wharfhouse, a few switchmen from the rail yards. The Ferris wheel stood whining and stretching in the wind.

"Look," everybody said.

The policeman turned and the carnival people turned and the fishermen turned and they all looked at the occupant in the black painted seat at the bottom of the ride. The wind touched and moved the black wooden seat in a gentle rocking rhythm, crooning over the occupant in the dim carnival light.

A skeleton sat there, a paper bag of money in its hands, a brown derby hat on its head.

Pamola's Caribou

BY ROGER S. VREELAND

LARRY SCOTT was a native of that hinterland of northern Maine where Katahdin, a great and strange mountain arises with a proclaiming majesty wholly unique among mountains. He was born in the very shadow of the mountain, and I think there was something of the spirit of the mountain in him. You'd laugh

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

It was the home of lightning and thunder from whence the Master of Darkness ruled the world

if you thought I meant "spirit" in anything but a poetic sense. How could a mountain have a. . . . Then laugh! Doc Cavanaugh was right, although I ridiculed his crazy talk about the Indian legends at the time.

I wished that Larry had reached the camp in time to climb Katahdin with the Ravens. All four of us wished it. But young Bob Raven, though adolescent and anemic, was bounding with a fanatic enthusiasm to climb the mountain and his father could no longer restrain him. I shouldn't blame his eagerness too much. I had it also. I've seen scores of others possessed by it. Any climber will tell you that this northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail is the toughest climb east of the Rockies. And best too, of course. It isn't only the mountain, but it's setting. A wilderness of timber clings to its base, but the mountain pushes away from this frivolous skirt of green until its bare granite shoulders rise unrivaled a mile into the sky. For ages even the Redmen shunned it—for it was the home of lightning and thunder, where awesome Pamola, master of darkness, ruled the world.

When Larry reached the camp about noon and learned that Bob Raven and his father had left about four hours earlier for the climb, he looked up at the sky, then toward the massive crest of granite to the east. "The mountain doesn't look right today," he said.

"The sky looks pretty clear overhead," I observed.

"Katahdin makes its own weather!"

We felt always that we could bank on what he said, on the weather, where the fish were biting, or any kind of forest wisdom, and now his note of pessimism made us all uneasy. He'd been on parts of Katahdin where no other human has ever set foot. Yet Larry often remarked that he didn't know much about the mountain, that a fellow needed more than one lifetime really to get acquainted with it. Of course a lot that he knew he got from his father, who used to take him up when he was only six years old. There was something mysterious about this father-son relationship. Although I often tried to draw him out I never got anywhere. Nobody seemed to know just what became of John Scott, although Larry, ten or eleven-years-old, was supposed to have been with him when he disappeared. Whether he simply became lost on the mountain, fell off a cliff or was overtaken by a sudden illness, didn't seem to be known. Larry had said that his father had been in places where even he wouldn't consider going. Only occasionally would Larry talk of his experiences. Usually at gatherings he sat in the background, content to listen and provide concise answers to the questions put directly to him. You might expect a man like Larry to be big and solid. But he wasn't. He was small-framed, wiry, lithe as a cat. I've seen him leap between rocks and keep his balance as though he were magnetized.

WE'D had our supper and were sitting in front of the camp on the edge of a small pond. Across the water and beyond a mile or so of forest the huge bulk of the giant lay like a sleeping monster. Its broad crest, like a great blanket raised and spread between two colossal knees, was crimson from a sun already set for the rest of the world. We were worried about the Ravens. They should have been back hours ago.

"I suppose," I said, looking toward Katahdin's crimson brow, "that the Indians would say now that Pamola was flushed with anger."

"Yes," replied Doc Cavanaugh, "and who knows but that maybe he is?" He paused and we all looked at the angular, tweed-suited physician, wondering if this was the beginning of another one of the discourses that so often had held us spellbound even though we didn't always believe everything he said. "Many a white man has wandered on the desolate, treeless tableland of Katahdin and found himself suddenly shuddering in half-belief of Pamola!"

Mrs. Cavanaugh gave her husband a look of strained toleration. "Please don't start on that line, dear! We're all nervous about the Ravens. And you have a way of making us believe your silly notions. Let's go inside and sit around the fire."

We followed her suggestion and strolled in. I held open the screen door while Mrs. Cavanaugh went in followed by Doc and Larry. For a while we sat around the fire listening for footsteps. I had seen them pack a flashlight, so we knew they wouldn't be without light.

AFTER a while Doc began to talk again. "We are prone to give the Indian too little credit for his superstitions," he said, lighting up his pipe. "We fail to realize that his beliefs, strange as they may seem to us, grew from the experiences of generations through untold centuries. We must not forget that the Indian was intelligent. Belief creates.

"Disbelief destroys. The Egyptians created Isis. And don't think that as long as Isis was believed in, yes, and perhaps after, that he didn't exist. Though we know what lightning is and what causes it, don't think that a potent god like Pamola couldn't use lightning to his own ends. While some of the Indians' ideas may seem childish to us, don't overlook that grown men today like to read in the so-called comic books about phantom heroes and supermen. Right now there's a group of psychologists studying the dangers of too many youths beginning to actually believe in those fancies. And, getting back to Katahdin, when Donn Fendler was lost, you remember the strange sights he was reported to have seen? They were referred to as hallucinations because of his fatigue and hunger. Well, perhaps!"

Doc Cavanaugh often talked like that. Crazy ideas, seeming to skip from one subject to another. Yet when he was finished you'd discovered there was a fine thread of logic through all he had said. I have a reasonably open mind, I think, and I draw my conclusions slowly. But on this occasion I found my thinking growing steadily antagonistic to Doc Cavanaugh. It felt that he himself didn't really believe what he was saying, and that it was poor judgment at a time like this, when we were all on edge, to talk along such lines.

I was about to throw some controversy into the circle when Cavanaugh jumped up. "By Jove," he said, "I believe they're coming!" He was right. We heard twigs cracking and in a moment saw a flashlight bobbing among the trees where the path came up along the pond.

We helped them off with their things. They were exhausted, especially young Bob who could hardly talk. I lighted the lanterns and Mrs. Cavanaugh got busy heating up their supper. Bob was lanky and as I've said, a bit anemic. But when the light was on I was amazed to see how pale and trembling he was.

"Better take a look at Bob, Doc," I said, and his father agreed, adding: "He's had quite a frightening experience."

Doc went for his medical bag, calling to get Bob on the couch and open his shirt.

The boy himself hadn't yet spoken a word.

"What happened?" I asked. "Slip on the rocks?"

"No," said Mr. Raven as he unbuttoned his son's shirt. "Bob did a pretty good job at climbing. He surprised me. I had to trail him nearly all the way. For the most part it was clear at the summit, although occasional drifts of mist came along, usually just above us, sometimes right around us. We ate our lunch at Baxter Peak, took in the view, placed our stones on the cairn and started back. Bob was ahead again, watching for the white paint blazes on the stones and leaping from one to another in high spirits. He must have been a hundred yards ahead of me when an unusually heavy mist drifted around us. I called for him to wait, but he must have kept going for some while. I called to him several times, but he didn't answer. A deep moan of thunder rolled over the plateau. I hurried. At last I found him. He was standing in an open patch of gravel, pale and trembling. I asked him what was the matter. He said the thunder had frightened him and that when he tried to answer me he couldn't raise his voice."

While Raven was talking, Cavanaugh used his stethoscope and put a thermometer in Bob's mouth. He called to his wife to bring him some whiskey. We stood around looking down at the boy. While the doctor read his temperature Bob gulped down the stimulant and then, abruptly, sat up casting his gaze intensely at his father.

"There is something else," said Bob. "I didn't want to tell you before, Dad. Because, well. . . . I've been more or less muddled. It wasn't the thunder that frightened me. It was the caribou. In the midst of that swirling fog I found myself standing not a dozen feet away from a huge white caribou. It was still and poised, looking directly at me. I've never seen a caribou before but I've seen their pictures. It wasn't a moose or a deer, but. . . ."

Larry Scott interrupted "There are no caribou in the Katahdin region," he said.

Bob looked at him silently, a light of challenge in his eyes.

"Well," said Mr. Raven, "Bob wrote a college thesis on big game of North America last spring. He should know. . . ."

Larry shook his head firmly and repeated, "There are no caribou on Katahdin. There haven't been since around 1900."

COLOR came back into Bob's face and he sat straighter. "I'd might as well tell you the rest of what happened," he said. "I not only saw this animal, which, er, *looked* like a white barrens caribou, but there was a man standing behind him! I don't know which frightened me most, for the man looked, well, like a wild man. He was tall, gaunt, thin, heavily bearded, and he wore tattered skins. I saw them just for a moment. Then there was a brilliant flash of lightning and they vanished! *Vanished!* Like a spectre in a Shakespearean play!"

I think we were all aware of the tenseness that came over Larry, although it was several moments before he said anything. He stepped toward Bob and looked down at him. I could see the muscles of his face working. Then he turned toward the rest of us.

"There used to be caribou on the tableland of Katahdin," he said. "There was a whole herd of barrens caribou there. No one knows for how long they lived on Katahdin's top. Probably for ages. But they never lived anywhere else in Maine so far as I know. The woods caribou, yes; but the barrens caribou lives in the far north. The lumber outfits hired men to go up and shoot them for meat. My father was one of those who took part in this. It was an easy supply, despite the hardship of climbing the mountain. And it was an easy sport. It would have been all right if they'd shot down just what they needed, but the trouble was they made a sport of it. They began to kill them off wantonly, just for fun. On the open

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plateau the animals had little refuge when surprised. Hundreds were killed and left to rot. Pure waste! Even now occasionally someone comes across the antlers of one of those caribou on the tableland. Yes, my father was one of those guilty. The herd diminished. Finally they knew just how many were left—and they stalked them down. The other hunters lost interest, but my father stuck it out. I, about ten-years-old, was with him on the last hunt. He knew there was one doe left and he was determined to get it. Even as a child I rebelled against what he was doing. I was sick in my stomach and prayed that the doe would get away. Then we came upon that doe, but to my father's great surprise she was accompanied by a huge buck—larger than any of the caribou he had ever seen. He swore in amazement and wondered why he'd never seen it before. He shot the buck and it dropped. It groaned and let out a muffled sort of scream and lay panting on the ground a moment before it died. I began to cry as my father took aim at the doe."

Larry stopped a minute. He met our intense gazes, swallowed, and sat on the edge of the cot with Bob. "This thing is sort of unreal," he said huskily. "I've tried to push it out of my memory. I've tried to convince myself that it wasn't real. People, at the time, drove me crazy with their questions. Then when I'd tell them the truth they wouldn't believe me. I swore that I'd never tell anyone again. But this story of Bob's changes things. The old man that he saw, and the white buck. I can sympathize with him. I know just how he feels, telling you something that's admittedly crazy, and seeing your looks of disbelief.

"Well, regardless, this is what happened. As my father took aim at the doe there was a blinding flash of lightning. The lightning in itself wasn't strange. Anyone who's roamed Katahdin knows how lightning can burst unexpectedly; how thunder will seem to rumble out of the rocks and move along through passages and gorges like an invisible but living thing. After the flash, my father, the doe, and even the carcass of the buck had disappeared. Impossible! Yes, I know. But I was there! I stood there, *alone!*"

Bob had buried his face in his hands and was trembling with a nervous sort of sobbing. The rest of us just stood around. Then Doc Cavanaugh cleared his throat, put his hand on Larry's shoulder. "Larry," he said, "I have a deeper understanding of these things than—than most people. For years I've studied the Indian legends and superstitions, and Indian mind, and I've probed into the metaphysical relationship between mind and matter. The things I've told you at various times you've all thought merely fanciful. But you'd lost all respect for my intelligence if I told you *all* of the things I know." Changing his tone he said: "Larry, will you climb Katahdin with me tomorrow?"

Larry nodded.

Doc then looked at me. "Will you come with us too?"

"Sure!" I said. It had been two years since I'd tackled the old rock and I was getting the itch for it again anyhow. Previously I had always taken the Roaring Brook trail up from the east to Chimney Pond Basin and then up the Cathedral Trail to Baxter Peak; or sometimes across the Saddle Trail or Dudley Trail, and across the Knife-Edge. But this time we were going up the better known Hunt Trail, the course followed by the famed Appalachian Trail which ends its two-thousand-mile-plus length at Baxter Peak.

MRS. CAVANAUGH packed our knapsacks and the three of us got an early start the next morning. The air was cool and the mountain was clear. We got on the trail and hiked a couple of miles, up and down. Even though we were close to Katahdin we couldn't see it because of the surrounding high trees. Then we came to a grassy clearing by a pond and the inspiring walls loomed astonishingly near.

"Frown from thy stronghold," Doc Cavanaugh began to quote, *"gloomy and proud Katahdin! Wrap thyself close with unapproachable forests, and dream of the past and of the red-man's ancient forgotten worship. Unchanged thou hast watched their leaf sere and wither from the tree of life. A race who fears not thy magic treads the wild paths of the woods and on the blue water boldly sails, unconscious of the olden enchantment. Yet thou art mighty as silent, and often in summers hereafter to blossom,*

shall strangers, gazing upon thee, feel the spell of thy presence. Then will they remember the white old king forever fashioning arrows. . . . The words of one of Maine's great poets, Frances Mace," he concluded.

We listened respectfully and smiled at his dramatic quality, then continued. We started the ascent soon after crossing the Sourdnahunk Toteroad at Katahdin stream. A short ways up we passed beautiful Katahdin Falls. The climbing grew steadily steeper, harder, and more tortuous. Weaving our way up the steep slant, oftentimes it was necessary to grasp the roots of trees overhead and literally hoist ourselves up. In another hour we were scrambling up bare spreads of rock, fingers and toes seeking crevices for leverage. The trees became stumpy and gnarled, until all at once we crossed the timberline where nothing grew but lichens and occasional tufts of grass. From now on it was climbing over boulders that varied in size from that of an office safe to a two-story house. Twisting through crooked clefts, over some rocks and under others, each few yards represented both an achievement and a problem of how to tackle the next. And each man had to make his decisions according to his abilities. We crossed narrow places where the mountain sloped away on either side, leaving one to look giddily into the world below. The air was colder. We stopped in a pocket of rocks to get sweaters from our knapsacks. After we crossed over the so-called Camel's Hump there lay above us the final stretch of steep ascent to the Gateway where two pillarlike rocks mark the beginning of the plateau. A rocky way surrounded by sky, like one of the allegorical engravings of William Blake.

The first spot in continental United States to greet the morning sun is Baxter Peak, the highest point on Katahdin, which rises off this plateau. After reaching the Gateway we swung toward the Peak. There were clouds in the sky now, and they didn't seem very far above us. There are times when the entire sky will be clear, yet clouds will cling to the top of Katahdin like a shroud. And that is what happened this day.

We stopped to drink at Thoreau Spring, a pool of fresh water that bubbles up on the desert-like tableland and then seeps back into the ground. Then, on Doc Cavanaugh's suggestion, we turned left on the cutoff for the Saddle Trail, leaving the now befogged peak unvisited.

"We're heading for the Northwest Plateau," said Larry. "As far as I can recollect, it was somewhere there that I last saw my father."

Just what Cavanaugh's thoughts were in taking us on this trip I didn't know, nor did I press him. I think he had discussed things more the night before with Larry than he had with me. I was glad enough for the excuse to go along. It all grew out of Bob Raven's weird experience and Larry's story, of course, and I suspected that Doc had some wild theories—on which I was in full mood to humor him along if he cared to talk about them.

EVERY now and then patches of fog would sweep by us, but for the most part visibility was satisfactory. Distant thunder rumbled occasionally, and despite myself I got to thinking about the legends of Pamola. We stopped to eat a little, then swung onto the Northwest Basin Trail. We were now getting into an area I had heard of but never before seen. To our right were the great bare North Peaks, and ahead to the left, The Klondike. I was enthralled by it all. Doc kept ahead most of the time. Sometimes considerably ahead. And several times I heard him mumbling.

When we saw the fawn standing to our left we all stopped at once from sheer surprise. Not being up on game, I was impressed only by the fact that we were seeing a wild creature close at hand. But Larry grasped my wrist. "It's a *caribou* fawn," he whispered. "And a *barrens!* I . . . I wonder if a herd is coming back!"

"Quiet!" rasped Doc who was twenty feet ahead of us. "Don't move unless I do!"

The creature's eyes were fixed upon us, not so much in alarm, it seemed, as with interest. Slowly he turned and started off, walking toward the west. Doc began to follow him cautiously, and motioned for us to get in line. Several times the fawn turned to look at us.

"He's going into the Klondike," said Larry.

"The Klondike!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and I'm not surprised," said Doc. Larry was excited. As a matter of fact we all were. The Klondike, a land of mystery, is a great elevated, forbidding spruce-flat, lying between Katahdin and the L-shaped Katahdinauguoh (Indian name for the cluster of peaks lying north and west of Katahdin—magnificent in themselves, suffering only from the misfortune of lying so close under the dominating shadow of Katahdin). Other than the famous Penobscot Indian Joe Francis, who hunted moose there and named the region because it suggested the wildness of the Canadian Klondike, few parties have traversed this inner sanctum of Katahdin fastness. No trails lead into it or through it. Except by climbing over its surrounding ranges, the only approach is a tortuous descent from the northeast where a stream has forced its way through a narrow and gloomy defile between Fort Mountain and the Northwest Plateau. This was the way we were going.

But, a short distance before we began our descent into the chasm, toward which the caribou was definitely leading us, Larry suddenly stopped and dropped to his knees. Doc and I hurried up to him.

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Larry. "Look at that!"

I didn't see it at first. Its rusty color was almost the same as of the rock and pebbles: The corroded remnant of a rifle.

"I'll swear this was my father's gun," Larry said slowly, picking it up. "This is the spot! I'm sure of it!" He looked toward the ambling fawn. Then he looked at Doc Cavanaugh. "Doc! What do you make of that fawn? This is—why, it's crazy—*following* a fawn at walking pace!"

Doc studied Larry silently. Then he looked at me. "Gentlemen," he said, "I suggest that none of us talk about this when we get back. There are some things people just won't believe. And there are certain things that I, after long study and meditation, understand partly but can't explain to others. As Hamlet said to Horatio, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Let's move and ponder afterward."

We went on. It seemed almost as though the fawn were lingering for us. As we followed it into the defile a sense of foreboding came over me, and, I could tell, over the others too. The spruce grew thick and dark and the crags hideous and massive with inscrutably black openings yawning on either side, crooked corridors branching off at various levels. Mists crept up the gorge like smoke and the rumble of thunder grew louder, closer. It began to rain lightly and lightning was striking about us. At times we lost sight of the caribou. Suddenly Larry said he smelled smoke. Neither of us believed him at first, until we smelled it too. After a little further descent we could see it. The fawn was now separated from us by boulders, and we saw no more of it. But we could see that the smoke was rising from a huge cavity in the rocks, a chamber the size of an ordinary livingroom, but with no ceiling. The sides were lined with outcropping trees and crags, and far above its black rim was shadowed by the taller trees growing on top. We turned a corner and looked in at the base of the shaft-like cavern, and were astonished. For an old man was hunched by a smoldering fire, whittling chips into it. He was, I was sure, the same old man Bob Raven had seen, for he fitted the same description. He seemed to be looking at us without seeing us. We stood in astonished silence a moment before Larry cried out, "My God! It's my father!" Then—as he started toward him—a blinding, searing flash of lightning cracked into the cavern, straight down the shaft from far above. We were thrown down, but recovered unhurt in a few moments. But the old man was gone!

"Look!" cried Doc Cavanaugh. We stepped to where the man had been. Cavanaugh's voice was thick and trembling. "Look!" he repeated, and pointed to something gray on the ground—clearly the remains of a human skull, and by it some white material that had been bones. Then something caught Larry's eye and he stooped to pick it up.

He fingered the object and handed it to Doc. "This was my father's watch," he said. "Doc! I don't understand!"

"Don't try to," replied Doc Cavanaugh gravely. "But the spirit of Pamola must have been very, very powerful!"

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

The Grotto of Cheer

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

A woman will wait for a long time—on either side of the grave!

"THERE are ordinary ghosts—and ghosts with a personality," ruminated Hal Plainfield, as he sat back with a promising twinkle in his deep-set eyes. "If anybody knows, I guess I do!"

The rest of us, sprawled on a ridge above camp on that windless warm August evening, saw the full moon rising in witch-veils of mist above a long, low eastern range. A hoot-owl wailed far off; the air, heavy and oppressive, had provoked an eerie mood even in the least susceptible of us.

"Yes, and you run into 'em when you're least looking for it," Hal went on. "I never dreamed, that day when I got stalled over at Spruce Gap—but maybe you're not interested?"

"Go on! Out with it! What happened at Spruce Gap?" the half dozen of us prompted, in chorus.

Hal arose, and stretched himself in the dim moonlight. He was a tall, rail-thin man with a weathered face; and you would never have suspected him of being anything but down-to-earth. But when he had re-seated himself, and slowly and solemnly fell back into his deep, drawling bass, his tone was one of awe and mystery.

"To this day, I've never wholly figured it out, but it was just about the most vivid thing I've ever experienced. It happened all

of ten years ago. Any of you know the timber regions of western Oregon?"

Several of us nodded.

"I was on a motor tour from Portland, to visit my sister and her three kids in some God-forsaken town not far from the California border. She expected me for dinner Sunday, but everything went against me: two tires blew out, one right after the other; and then a truck sideswiped me and sent me into a ditch, not much hurt, but cursing like the devil and delayed another couple of hours. But the real trouble didn't set in till I came to Spruce Gap."

"Where's Spruce Gap?" piped up the youthful voice of Sam Watson from the shadows half a dozen yards away.

"None of you would know, if you didn't have the hard luck to get stuck there," rumbled Hal. "It's a little town in a hollow in a logged off region. There's something weird about the very setting. On the west you see a high ragged ridge, with the charred ghastly trunks of ruined trees standing up like burnt toothpicks. On the east, equally high, a queer ragged formation of rock startles you, with the forest growth cut away. It's called the Grinning Devil, and the name just fits it, because in a certain light it looks exactly like a devil leering with the most ghastly malevolence."

"Maybe you were letting yourself imagine things," I commented, skeptically.

HAL DID not seem to notice my remark, but went on, "I was just about in the center of that doggone town, stepping on the gas for all I was worth, because I still had a hundred miles to do, when I heard a sudden clattering in the engine and the pesky thing stopped dead. Yes, plumb dead! I couldn't budge it! It being Sunday, I had a job finding help, but did manage to drag out old Jim Cahey, the one automobile mechanic in the burg, and for a consideration of about everything in my pocketbook, he promised to get busy. It was then about six o'clock—a sort of sultry August evening, like tonight; and I was just about crazy to get started again. But that pokey cuss took his time; lit a cigarette; fished around inside the car and under it, told me what he thought was wrong though I couldn't make head or tail of it all, and said he expected he'd have it ready in a few hours. The earliest he would promise was, vaguely, about nine or ten o'clock.

"Well, after cursing him plenty, I managed to put in a long-distance call to my sister; and then, being hungry as a starved hound, I set about looking for a place to eat. But again luck seemed against me. There was one hashhouse called 'The Purple Frog' but a sign on it, 'Closed Sundays.' There was another named after 'The Grinning Devil', but the sign was still more exasperating, 'Gone fishing—back Monday.' Aside from that, there wasn't even the pretense of an eating joint in the whole metropolis. Where in hell's name am I going to get a bite?' I flung out at Jim Cahey, as he lay with his head half poked out from under my car. And he turned his flashlight full in my face, and muttered, 'Damned if I know. Why don't you see the Milligans? End of this street, then third shack to the right'."

"Feeling like a beggar about to ask for a hand-out, I started away. I hated like hell to ask dinner of the Milligans, whoever they were; and it was this accursed pride that got the better of me. I had just come to the end of the street when I saw—it was over the last house—the sign, 'Grotto of Cheer. Board and lodging.' I did think it queer that Cahey hadn't mentioned this place. I also thought there was something peculiar in the looks of the house, which certainly didn't seem at all what the name implied.

"It wasn't only its run-down condition—the fact that the steps sagged, the roof above the vine-covered porch drooped at a sickly angle, and the whole two-story barn looked famished for a good coat of paint. Since it was still full daylight, I couldn't help seeing the cobwebs about the stoop, and the dust and fallen leaves that lay everywhere, layers deep. 'Damned slovenly housekeeping,' I remember thinking. But there was something I felt rather than thought—a hard-to-describe shuddery sensation, along with a chilly wave down my spine. But by nature I've never been superstitious; if I wanted a good meal, the thing to do, I told myself, was to ask for it where meals were regularly served. So I turned in at the 'Grotto of Cheer.' But even as I did so, my steps

dragged, and a sort of numbness came over me."

Plainfield paused long enough to light his pipe. Though the evening was warm, two of us had kindled a campfire across from him. By its uncannily flickering beams, Hal continued, somberly.

"When I knocked, it seemed to me that the echo was unusually long, deep and solemn. But there was no other response. If hunger hadn't been raging within me, I would have let things go at that. However, it infuriated me to be ignored, so I rapped again, this time much louder. I must have hit the panels harder than I'd intended, because the door gave a creak, and swung inward on its hinges. And, as it burst open, I saw *her* standing there before me."

"Who?" we all demanded, in one voice.

Plainfield took several reflective puffs at his pipe before continuing.

"I didn't, of course, know who she was. But I was struck by her appearance. She was an exceptionally tall, slender woman—fully as tall as the average man. She looked about fifty-five to sixty, and her hair was silvery white.

"Her face was long, clear, pure and sorrowful—the most deeply sorrowful, I believe, that I'd ever looked upon; the furrows of grief that ran down from it were like those of some suffering saint. But what really struck me were her eyes. They were dark, but had a burning fierce intensity, like the concentrated expression of a vehement, feeling soul; and I also felt in them a compelling power, a magnetism that held me against my will in a way I find it hard to make plain. But the time, I think, my emotion was chiefly surprise—surprise that she should have been standing there so silent, so unresponsive.

"However, a faint smile spread across the tragic countenance; I saw her motioning; and thought I heard her murmur, 'Come in.' I know, at any rate, that my feet obeyed; though as I closed the door behind me, I was surprised by the odor of extreme mustiness—the smell of dampness and decay, as in a wood lodge long unused."

SOMEHOW, I shivered as Plainfield spoke; shivered in spite of the warm evening and the fire. I think we all felt an unnatural chill running down our spines as he resumed.

"The house inside wasn't only stale-smelling; it was dark. I don't know how I had failed to notice it from outside, but the shutters were drawn. Through little chinks and crannies, the light came filtering in, making it possible to see reasonably well; but the whole effect was gloomy, almost sepulchral; and here and there the shadows were especially deep, making me start back in a queer, jumpy way. My impulse was to leave at once; however, I couldn't think of any good excuse; and, besides, my hostess was beckoning, and her eyes kept that intense, compelling look.

"Almost automatically, I followed her into the dining-room. The long table was spread with a dark cloth, and was set for seven persons—I distinctly remember the number. But there wasn't a soul about except my hostess. A grandfather's clock leering from the opposite wall—leering is the way it looked to me—couldn't have been in good working order, because it pointed to the hour of twelve. The painting of an aged dame in a hoop skirt hung in a stoop-shouldered way just beyond the clock, and the dusty-looking draperies across from the dinner table had slipped, and slanted at an odd angle from the wall. The shutters were drawn in this room too, and the musty smells were pretty nearly overpowering.

"For the first time now it came to me that I hadn't said a word since entering. Somehow, words didn't come easily as I turned to my hostess, and muttered something about wanting dinner. I thought that a faint smile softened the dismal features as I spoke, but I hadn't at all expected her answering tone. It was hollow, almost unreal, if you can imagine a tone of voice to be unreal; it reminded me a little of a person heard over a radio, speaking with great difficulty in a large hall, with undertones of annoying echoes. Yet the words were as commonplace as could be. 'Of course we'll be glad to have you with us.' And she motioned me to a seat.

"I moved a chair back, and some small thing scuttled from under it with a sudden frightened rustling. I think it was my own alarm quite as much as anything else that made me slip into a seat.

"The white-haired woman was now standing just above me. I did not like the concentration of her eyes, which seemed to be growing even more intense, with something almost devouring in the stare. 'We've been waiting for you, Henry,' she said, in the same hollow, unnatural voice as before.

"It was then that I began to wonder if something wasn't wrong with the old woman's head. My name, of course, isn't Henry; I could see she had confused me with someone else, and I didn't like the confusion.

" 'All these years, we've been waiting for you,' she went on. 'Just you stay here. The others will be here now any minute.'

"Naturally, I hadn't the dimmest notion who 'the others' might be. What was more, I didn't want to know. By this time I had forgotten that I was hungry; my only desire was to leave that accursed place. But somehow I seemed rooted in my chair. The woman's uncanny eyes held me fixed there. Strangely, as I gazed back at her, it came to me that I couldn't see the iris—this may have been due to the darkness of the room, but it seemed to me as if I was peering into two black pits.

" 'They will all be here. I know they will be here,' she repeated, with an unmodulated monotony that added a new weirdness to the occasion. 'Just you wait, Henry. They have to be here.'

"A faint creaking and rustling in an adjoining room seemed a fitting punctuation to these words. It was no use telling myself, either, that I was only listening to the scurrying of rats or mice. I felt the hair on my scalp prickling. I felt no desire on earth except to be gone. And yet I told myself I was the biggest fool and coward west of the Mississippi to be afraid of a white-haired old woman in an empty house."

A LONG silence followed while Plainfield, rekindling his pipe, stared at the pale-yellow apparition of the moon that was rising in phantom veils of mist. The cry of some far-off beast came with an unearthly throbbing to our ears. But none of us had anything to say before the speaker went on.

"By now, I suppose, my eyes were getting used to the dim illumination. I was surprised to notice the unlighted kerosene lamp across from me; and it burst over me that there were no electric fixtures about the place. I also caught a glimpse, through an open door, of a sewing machine—the old-fashioned kind, worked by foot. I saw, too, that there was a bird cage across from the grandfather's clock—but no sign of a bird. And there was a large mouldy-looking dog collar on the floor, without any sign of a dog.

" 'They have been gone so long now. They will be back soon, they will have to be back,' the woman droned on, in the same monotonous hollow voice, which now, however, had a distinct wailing quality. 'It's so long since they have gone. They will have to be back. I have been waiting all this time. If you will just stay here, Henry, we'll all have dinner together again.'

"I couldn't fail to note that 'again.' But her tone, it seemed to me, was more of a command than a request; it had the determination of one who will brook no denial. Time after time I tried my best to rise from the chair; but my muscles were paralyzed.

"Nevertheless, the whole situation seemed clear enough. That poor lonely woman, living in this great lonely house, had been demented by her misfortunes; and now, returning to the past, mistook me for one of her relations. Too bad, I thought, that the poor afflicted soul couldn't be placed in an institution, where she would be cared for properly.

"But this was only the view of my reasoning mind. There was some part of me, beneath and beyond reason, which didn't accept any such explanation, but shuddered and went cold all the way through. And yet, fixed by the glare of those fierce penetrating eyes, I had ceased trying to escape, hardly dared even to think of escape.

"By imperceptible degrees—for twilight takes its time in those latitudes—it was getting darker. And, oddly, the woman's long, furrowed face seemed to be growing even clearer as the dusk descended, as though it burned with some inner light. But it hardly for a moment took its gaze off me.

"That is to say, at first it hardly took its gaze off me. After a long while—maybe half an hour, or an hour, for I was beyond judging time—the great transformation came. Her face seemed transfused—yes, transfused—with a blazing radiance. I have

never seen such joy illuminating any other countenance. 'Ah, there they are! Yes, there they all are!' she exclaimed. And she ran to the front door; and uncannily, seemingly without any movement of her hands, it opened.

"A puff of wind was all that entered. A swirl of dust greeted my nostrils. In that startling interval, I would at last have leapt up and fled, had I not still been held despite myself, pinned down as by some power outside myself, fascinated and horrified by the scene that followed.

"As the door closed—again apparently without action of human hands—a peal of joy rang forth. It may seem a paradox to say that, while the tones were weird and hollow as ever, the joy seemed pure and undiluted, like that on the woman's countenance. 'Ah, here you are at last! I knew you were coming! Mary! George! Arthur! Joe! Ellen! Katie! How are you? How are you? Step right in, all of you! Henry's here already, waiting for you!'

"With the enthusiastic motions of one escorting a crowd, the woman re-entered the dining-room. But by the fading light, I could see that she was still alone."

UNACCOUNTABLY, the night seemed to have grown cold. I huddled near the fire and shivered, as did several of the others. Only the crackling of the flames broke the silence before the speaker went on.

"There was still light enough for me to see the old woman's face, which was as jubilant as ever as she came drifting toward me. 'Here, Mary, you sit here! George next to you! That's it! Arthur over there, beside Katie! Why, it's just like old times! There, Joe, I knew you wouldn't wait to be asked! Why, you haven't changed one bit! Nor you either, Ellen! Not the least of it! But it's been so long, so long since you were here!'

"On and on in this vein she rambled, in that strangely unreal, monotonous voice that somehow continued to give the impression of extreme pleasure. I tell you, boys, I was petrified as I sat watching, gripped in a sort of ghastly spell, like the spectator of a scene in a nightmare. After a minute or two, she appeared satisfied that her visitors were well seated; then turned toward me with a smile though her eyes still seemed hollow black sockets, and beckoned with a scarred white four-fingered hand, whose disfigurement I now noticed for the first time. 'See, Henry has come too! Here's Henry. He always was one to keep to himself, Henry was.' And almost without a break, as she swung about and gestured toward the darkness at my side, 'Down, Rover! Down! Be a good dog, and don't put your paws on the table!'

"Somehow that reference to an animal—an animal that wasn't there—seemed just about the culminating stroke. My lips opened—and I'm sure that a faint, cracked sound, which may have been a stillborn scream, came forth. With the fury of a desperate fear, I tried to rise; but it was just as when you're asleep and dreaming, and know you're asleep, but can't for the life of you wake up. I could no more have risen than I could have sunken through the floor.

" 'Now, Henry, why don't you say hello to the folks?' my hostess demanded, her look of exultation gone as she turned her long sorrow-trenched face upon me with the intensity of a burning passion. I really felt her now as a personality; felt her as a being of a powerful will and tremendous tortured emotions; felt her as one suffering from some prodigious unuttered want, which she would seek to satisfy, as a thirsting man seeks to satisfy his craving for drink. 'Come, come, Henry, get up and greet them. Talk to them,' she urged, the concentrated blaze of her attention full upon me. 'Let bygones be bygones. Come, come, they're your own flesh and blood.'

"Those words 'flesh and blood' chilled me like a touch of ice. And it may have been those words that—would you believe it?—gave me the sense of presences all about me; the feeling that the room was filled, crowded with invisible witnesses, their eyes fastened upon me, watching my every move, my every expression. By all that I have ever held sacred, boys, I could have sworn that this was so. At that command, 'Get up and greet them,' I did manage to wrench myself free of the vise that had gripped me; I did struggle to my feet. But as I left my chair, I made an observation that unfroze my lips in a blood-curdling shriek. Sure, it was all due to some trick of the light, some whim of my crazy imagination; but the face of the

old woman, in the growing dusk, suddenly seemed not the face of an old woman at all, suddenly had taken on the leering, fiendish expression of the Grinning Devil.

"EVEN as a fresh cry vibrated in my throat, my legs regained their mobility. The woman stood directly in my path, blocking my exit; and as I raised a panicky arm to brush her aside, I made the discovery that even to this day turns my spine cold at the very remembrance. She offered no resistance at all to my movements. My arm passed right through her."

* * * * * * *

After a silence of several minutes, Sam Watson inquired, "And did you ever find any light on the mystery?"

"Well," Plainfield drawled, "nothing but what Jim Cahey told me. He was still puttering away at the car when I wobbled back to him. 'Have dinner?' he asked. . . . 'No such luck,' I answered. 'Saw a sign down the road, "Grotto of Cheer," and went in.'

"He dropped his wrench, and turned upon me with his jaws drawn wide apart in amazement. 'Like hell you did!' he answered. 'Why, there ain't been nobody living there these last twenty years.'

" 'No, sirree,' he went on, after a minute, 'nobody'll rent the place, they say spooky things go on there. Used to belong to the Grimwalds. Seven boys an' girls there was in that family, an' Miss Amy she used to keep house for 'em all 'an watch over 'em like a mother bird. That was before the tragedy.'

" 'What tragedy?'

" 'Over Emerald Lake way. It was after a heavy rain, an' an embankment fell on a car five of 'em were riding in, an' snuffed 'em out in one second. They say poor Miss Amy never did get over it. She put up the sign, "Gotto of Cheer," an' took in boarders for a living, but just the same she grieved a terrible lot, and never was quite right again, I guess. She died only a year or two later.'

" 'What did she look like?'

" 'Oh, she was white-haired, with dark eyes, and was mighty tall for a woman. Folks sometimes called her Four Fingers, because she'd lost one finger in an accident.'

"I thanked Cahey, and was about to pass on, when he looked up at me in a sort of funny way.

" 'You know,' he said, 'there was one of the brothers that didn't get along so well with the others, he was away most of the time an' was the only one that didn't end in the accident, though nobody seems to know what did happen to him. It's funny, Mister, but as I looked at you sideways just now, I could of taken you for his double.'

" 'What was his name?' I asked. And my heart gave a strange sudden leap, and I could feel the hair once more prickling on my scalp as Cahey turned to me and slowly reported, 'Well, the boys always called him Beanpole, he was that skinny, but guess he didn't have any honest-to-goodness name but Henry'."

A Death Crown For Mr. Hapworthy

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

JONATHAN HAPWORTHY was not long for this world, four competent doctors had assured him. (A coronary condition.) But, as he was in his seventies, this did not disturb Mr. Hapworthy a great deal. He expected to die sometime; everyone did, and the terrors of hellfire did not frighten him. Mr. Hap-

The death crown was not for sale; it was for saving souls!

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

worthy was an atheist—when he thought of religion at all as anything more than an interesting study in contrasts between, say, what the Buddhists and the Zoroastrians believe. He was a student of all theologies, but privately he did not for a moment believe in the hereafter.

When the body broke down, was his opinion, it simply stopped like a good watch that has ticked its last tick. Sometimes, rather wistfully, he wished that he did believe in a life after death; for it seemed to him that far too many people died before they were half finished living. But he had uncovered no facts in any of his studies with which he could convince himself—and Mr. Hapworthy believed only in the known and proven; though, for amusement, he liked to dabble in the supernatural.

However, disbelief in a system of rewards and punishments after death did not give one the right, he felt, to act like a stinker while one was among the living—if only because it was a damned stupid way to live. He believed in everyone's doing whatever he liked, so long as it did not interfere too irreparably with the rights of others. And by that creed he lived: a tall dignified old gentleman, at the age of seventy-four, with neat mild features, carefully parted white hair, and a pedantic way of speaking that reminded one of an old-school professor. He had never married, was an orphan, had few intimate friends, and seldom fraternized with anyone other than the sad-eyed Labrador retriever that trotted at his heels always. He had but one hobby—collecting amulets and charms; and he had but one ambition—to bequeath said collection to the Smithsonian Institute, and thereby perpetuate the name of Hapworthy in the same way that Mr. Carnegie had left his name for posterity to read above library doors all over the country.

Now, in his neat modest apartment in Washington, he sat gloating delicately over the showcases that lined every wall. It was his habit just before lunch to work up an appetite by looking over his treasures and reminding himself that no other single individual in the world had in his possession so many authentic curios pertaining to ancient, medieval, and modern magic. It did not occur to Mr. Hapworthy to connect the fact that he had already lived three years longer than the doctors said he could, with the fact that he had in his collection every known health-amulet in existence since the history of man. Nor did it strike him as significant that, the very day he had acquired a certain odd-looking gray rock, purported to be the immemorial "Philosopher's Stone" which could turn all base metals into gold, he had come into a sizable fortune from an uncle he never knew he had. By no means did it occur to him that, ever since his purchase of a peculiar bright gem, said to have been pried from the girdle of Venus, strange women often followed him on the street and were known to smile at him unduly. . . .

NONE of these things occurred to Mr. Hapworthy, and he would have laughed drily, had anyone mentioned such ideas. Like religion, contiguous magic was something other people could believe in if they liked. Jonathan Hapworthy merely collected them.

Putting on his hat at a square angle and taking up his cane, he made one more circle of his apartment living room, flicking dust from a tray of Egyptian scarabs, examining a display of High John the Conqueror roots for signs of rot, and polishing the tarnish from a silver evil-eye charm that dated back to the Borgia era. There was nothing, Mr. Hapworthy thought proudly, that he did not have in the way of talismen purported to draw all good things to, and fend all bad things from, their possessor. One day the name "Jonathan Hapworthy" would be a synonym for knowledge of the supernatural, as one immediately thought "snakes" when one said "Ditmars." With his collection would go the book he was writing on the subject. Perhaps Smithsonian would give him a whole room in the museum, since he planned to endow it himself.

"Ah, well. Come along, Trevo," he called to his dog. "Lunch!"

Humming cheerfully to himself, Mr. Hapworthy strolled to the elevator and walked in. The cage did not descend at once, and he frowned in slight annoyance at the gawky hillbilly who had been hired during the illness of the regular operator.

"Well? Come, come, my good lad," Mr.

Hapworthy prodded gently. "If I'm late to lunch, I shan't get a seat. . . ."

The boy turned, flushing in apology, and fumbled with a small candybox he had been peering into with such absorption that he did not see his passenger enter. Now, clumsily, he tried to shut the box and start the elevator with one gesture—the result being that box and contents tumbled to the floor at Mr. Hapworthy's feet. Being a polite man, he bent to retrieve it . . . and was startled to see a large round ball of white feathers, packed tight, each feather overlaying the whole as smoothly as a bird's wing. He reached for it, curious, but the boy cried out sharply:

"Don't! D-don't tech that, mister! Not afore ye say *'Matthew, Mark, Luke, John'* . . . I seen a man drap dead that-a-way, when I was a young'n . . . !"

MR. HAPWORTHY withdrew his hand, amused; and allowed the boy to pick up his own belongings. His bored blue eyes had brightened visibly at the other's words, as the sad-eyed hunting dog at his leg might have perked up at the faraway honk of a mallard.

"What on earth is that thing?" he asked eagerly. "Some sort of hoodoo?"

The boy looked pained. "Nawsuh. Hoodoos is for niggers! This-heah's a holy sign, belongin' to my Granny. She sont it to me to carry home to my maw when I go. . . . Ain't no mail de-livery closer'n ten mile from our cabin, and Maw she's down in her back, cain't walk hardly no piece. . . ."

Mr. Hapworthy, who was not versed in backwoods dialect, translated this with some difficulty. "Yes, but . . . what *is* it?" he persisted. "How did those feathers get packed together like that? Are they glued?"

"*Naw*suh!" The boy looked actively shocked. "You ever try to glue ary bunch o' feathers together? . . . The angels done this. Mean you ain't got nary death-crown in your fambly? I swannee!" He clucked his tongue in sympathy, eyeing Mr. Hapworthy with pity not unmixed with disapproval. "I reckon," he commented, "none o' yore folks ever got to Glory. Hit ain't many of *our'n*," he admitted kindly. "Jest Grandpaw. Pap, being as he died drunk in a ditch, never had his head on nary pillow. Don't reckon it'd a-done no good if he had, him bein' a sinner all his born days."

Mr. Hapworthy choked, but managed to keep a straight face as the elevator sank smoothly downward. "I'm afraid I still don't understand," he murmured. "Where do you get these . . . er . . . death crowns? Where do they come from?"

"Out'n the pillow where a good soul lays his head when he dies," the mountain boy said simply. "I reckon the angels ball up the feathers that-a-way, makin' a set o' wings in a hurry for the sperrit to fly to Heaven. When there's one in the pillow, it's sure a comfort to the fambly, knowin' their kin got to Glory all right. . . ."

Only by faking a fit of coughing was Mr. Hapworthy able to cover his mirth this time. He mopped his eyes with a silk handkerchief, polished his pince-nez, and set it firmly back on his nose. Then a canny gleam came into his eye.

"I don't suppose," he asked cautiously, "that you'd care to sell that . . . er . . . death-crown of yours? For, say, fifty dollars?"

He saw the boy's eyes widen at the sum mentioned, perhaps more money than he had ever owned in his life. But the square chin came up, lips set in stubborn defense.

"Nawsuh. I don't reckon *anybuddy'd* sell ary death-crown out'n their fambly. Why, it's be like . . . like sellin' the gravestone off'n a grave!"

"Oh. . . . Oh, I see." Mr. Hapworthy looked dashed, but he had by no means given up. He had only begun to fight! He was off on the quest of a new rare amulet, surely one that Smithsonian had never even heard of; a brand new one indigenous to the Southern mountains, though possibly having its origin—like many of the old hillbilly ballads and expressions—in Old English tradition. This was a real treasure, one he must not let escape his collection. Everyone had scarabs, fertility charms, health-amulets; but nowhere before in the learned tomes had he ever read about a death crown! A discovery of this sort could make him famous as a collector and a student of the supernatural. Mr. Hapworthy took a deep breath.

"A hundred dollars?"

The boy gasped, but set his jaw even more stubbornly. "Nawsuh. Not that we

couldn't use the money, with Maw ailin' and all the young'ns to feed through the wintertime. . . ." He hesitated, then shook his head positively. "Nawsuh. Granny wouldn't like it a-tall. Nor Maw neither."

"*Two* hundred dollars?" murmured Mr. Hapworthy insidiously.

THE youth cast a look at him, almost frightened. He clutched the box with its weird contents to his hollow chest, and shook his head violently. Then, as his temper started to speak again, he darted out of the elevator and vanished from sight through the service entrance, out of earshot and out of range of any further offers.

"Oh, *drat*! These superstitious numbskulls!" Mr. Hapworthy exploded.

The dog whined softly at his ankle, looking up anxiously to make sure his master's anger was not directed at him. Mr. Hapworthy patted him absently, thinking in rapid circles.

"I must have that thing, Trevo," he muttered furiously. "I simply *must!* It's a real find. Genuine Americana—while most of my talismen are of foreign origin. I've *got* to get that thing. By hook or by crook!"

But frustration was his lot that afternoon, for on his return from lunch he found the old elevator man had risen from his sickbed and resumed his work. The young hillbilly, of course, had been discharged.

"Oh DRAT!" cursed Mr. Hapworthy. "Where did he go? Can you give me his local address?"

The elevator man shrugged. "Sorry, sir. He was living here, in the basement with the janitor. Maybe I can get you his home address. He did say something about catching a bus back to the farm. . . ."

Hours later, accompanied by the doleful-looking retriever in a carrying-case with his luggage, Mr. Hapworthy was on a cross-country bus headed for a little hilltown, just barely on the map at all, called Big Thickety Creek. He alighted at a filling station—which turned out to be the bus station, business section, and residential district of Big Thickety. With some difficulty, he managed to check his luggage and hire a guide, who promised to take him over the mountain to the Turney's share-cropped farm, and come back after him in two hours. During that period, he was confident, he could effect the purchase of the white-feathered "death crown" he coveted.

His hopes soared when the rickety Model-T deposited him at his goal—a sagging two-room cabin in the center of a sparsely-grown cornfield. There was an open "dogtrot," or hallway, connecting the two rooms. Outside in the packed-clay yard was a rundown well, a gourd-pole for martins (insurance against chicken-hawks, although there were no chickens now clucking around the impoverished-looking place), and a corncrib whose roof had fallen in.

Mr. Hapworthy knocked. At once a flock of perhaps nine ragged children swarmed about him out of nowhere, giggling, pulling at his neat knife-creased trousers, or merely staring. One screeched something, and a thin slattern of a woman came out of the kitchen-room, a bunch of turnip greens which she had been picking over held in one hand like an awkward bouquet. She ducked her head shyly, smoothed back her hair, and said formally:

"Howdy. Come in and set." Then: "You sellin' funeral in-surance? We don't want none. . . ."

MR. HAPWORTHY cleared his throat, said he was not selling funeral insurance, and made his way gingerly into the kitchen through a mass of giggling children. The poverty of the place struck him like a blow, though he could see the woman's pitiful attempts to keep her crowded little home clean and cheerful. The board floor was freshly scrubbed, and there were magazine pictures cut out and tacked on the wall everywhere. All the little girls' hair had been carefully braided with bows of red calico, and all the little boys' overalls had been neatly patched.

Mr. Hapworthy cleared his throat again. He was ill at ease and, never a man to mince words, came directly to the point.

"Your son Lute," he began. "I happened to see a . . . a death crown he was bringing from your . . . ah . . . your mother? I wondered if . . . ah . . . you'd cared to sell it. For inclusion in my collection of amulets and charms, to be displayed in the Smithsonian museum after my death. Ah . . . My last off was two hundred dollars. I'll make

that three hundred, madam, and that's my last word. What do you say?"

THE mountain woman was staring at him, trying hard, he saw, to follow his words few of which she could understand. But she did comprehend the words "death crown" and "three hundred dollars." Light blazed in her thin tired face all at once, and Mr. Hapworthy saw her eyes sweep over the gaunt brood of children clustered about her, now quiet with wonder as he spoke.

"Lord help my time! Three hundred dollars?" the woman whispered. "I never seen more than a hundred, time I got my man's in-surance money, poor soul," she added piously. "Some say he wasn't no count, but he suited *me* all right and the chillun. . . . But. . . . Why, I couldn't *sell* you no death crown, mister!" she said quietly and with a wistful regret that made Mr. Hapworthy feel more uncomfortable than ever. "Why, nawsuh. I don't say we don't need the money, right bad. But. . . . Paw's death crown? It wouldn't be right to sell nothing like that. . . ." She laughed lightly, scatting one of the younger children away from the hot wood stove. "Lutie come by and brung it a while ago, fore he tuck off to git him another job. In the cotton mill, if he's lucky. He tole me some feller offered to buy it. We had us a good laugh about that," she smiled at her guest in complete friendliness. "I reckon," she murmured kindly, "you jest didn't know what hit *was*, likely."

"Er . . . no. No, I guess I didn't," muttered Mr. Hapworthy, completely chastened by the gentle reproof in this starved weary mountain-woman's eyes. Faced even though she was with a winter of starvation for herself and her children, she evidently had her own standards, and clove to them with a simple integrity.

He fumbled with his hat; looked here and there to avoid that steady gaze. His eye fell on a large daguerrotype portrait of an old man with a gray beard and warm humorous eyes. It was hanging over the stove.

"That's . . . ah . . . that's your father?" he mumbled. "The one who . . . ?" He floundered, making conversation to bridge the silence. "You resemble him a great deal. And your son, Lute. The same eyes. . . ."

The woman's expression changed abruptly, all reproof gone. She beamed up at the portrait, then back at Mr. Hapworthy.

"Yessuh. That's Paw. He was a circuit rider. Preached all over these mountings, come rain or shine. A better man never lived—though he like to've got hisself unchurched, account of his notions. He had some idee that good souls could leave Heab'in and come back to earth, if there was something you tuck a fancy to do, to help them that was still livin'. Said you didn' *have* to set around and play the harp. . . . My! he talked real crazy. But he saved many a soul in his day. Anybuddy could talk to him, he was that homey. We knowed there'd be a death crown in *his* pillow when he passed on. . . ."

"Er . . . yes. Yes. Naturally." Mr. Hapworthy choked, looking up at the kindly face of the old man in the picture.

The light was not good—or perhaps it was only smoke from the wood stove that made it hazy. But he could have sworn one of those humorous eyes winked at him a split-second before he glanced away. He kept looking back at the portrait, warmed in a strange way, a little feeling of loneliness that had always haunted him vanishing at sight of it. Where had he seen such a face before? Oh yes—the Biblical beard; that was it. It reminded him of the pictures of the Disciples on Sunday School cards he had seen as a child. Long ago—when he had believed in a number of things he knew now could not possibly exist. Santa Claus, fairies, angels beside one's bed. . . .

All at once Mr. Hapworthy did an impulsive thing, for him.

Sidling over to a crude kitchen table, he fumbled in his pocket for a moment, took out a wad of bills, and stuffed them behind a coffee can. He moved quickly, and no eyes in the room, except the pictured eyes over the stove, saw his gesture.

A FEW hours later, riding back toward Washington on the bus, Mr. Hapworthy was annoyed with himself. He had not only failed to acquire the object that he coveted most in the world, but he had given way to a maudlin impulse to help some stupid ignorant people he had never seen before and would certainly never see again.

There was no good reason, other than sloppy sentiment, why that woman would not sell her treasured "holy sign" for the edification of the American public! Why had he not insisted? He might, indeed, have given her a smooth sales talk about its being her "religious duty," or some such rot. An illiterate sharecropper would have been easy prey to his collecting ability. But instead . . . !

Mr. Hapworthy glared down at his feet, where the retriever lay curled up uncomfortably in his carrying-case. He lifted the lid, patted the silky head fondly to soothe his irritation . . . and a moment later toppled forward on his face.

Dimly, through the clutching pain around his heart, he was aware of excited fellow-passengers hovering over him; of the bus screeching to a stop in some nameless little town; of his being carried into a small dingy hotel. A fat rather pompous doctor was located, who examined him with a great show of concern.

"Mr. . . . er . . . Hapworthy? Yes. Are your affairs in order, sir? You were aware of your condition, of course. . . . Who is your next of kin? I'm afraid . . . ah . . . this is it."

"Oh *drat*!" said Mr. Hapworthy, thoroughly annoyed. Then he shrugged. "Well—I suppose everyone must die sometime. . . . Yes, my affairs are in order. No relatives. Though you might notify my landlord as soon as possible," he added thoughtfully. "He'll want to be arranging for a new tenant. Oh, and I wish you'd ship my dog to him, if you will. He's very fond of duck-shooting, and Trevo here is a splendid hunter. Myself, I detest killing things.

"Er . . . yes." The doctor fumbled for words for a moment, then: "What is your faith, sir? You'll want a pastor, of course. . . . Or a priest? There's also a rabbi here in town. I'm a Methodist, myself," he added stiffly. "But my aunt is a Christian Scientist, if you . . . ?"

"Really?" whispered Mr. Hapworthy, drowsily interested through his sedative. "Remarkable creed—that all matter is merely a figment of mortal mind. Ridiculous, of course," he added chattily. "Though if it's any comfort to anyone, I'm the very last man to try and arouse logical doubts. . . . No, no," he waved airily. "The Supreme Diety—if there is one, as all theologies seem to contend—doesn't know about my sins already, I don't see why recounting them to some poor overworked clergyman would change anything. Damned embarrassing custom, anyhow . . . !"

THE doctor gasped, and compressed his lips. "Sir," he said severely, "this is hardly the time for blasphemy. You're *dying*, man! Don't you *care* what happens to your immortal soul after . . .?"

"Poppycock," murmured Mr. Hapworthy pleasantly. "But I would like to have lived a bit longer. My collection isn't complete . . . !"

He sighed crossly, and closed his eyes. He never opened them again.

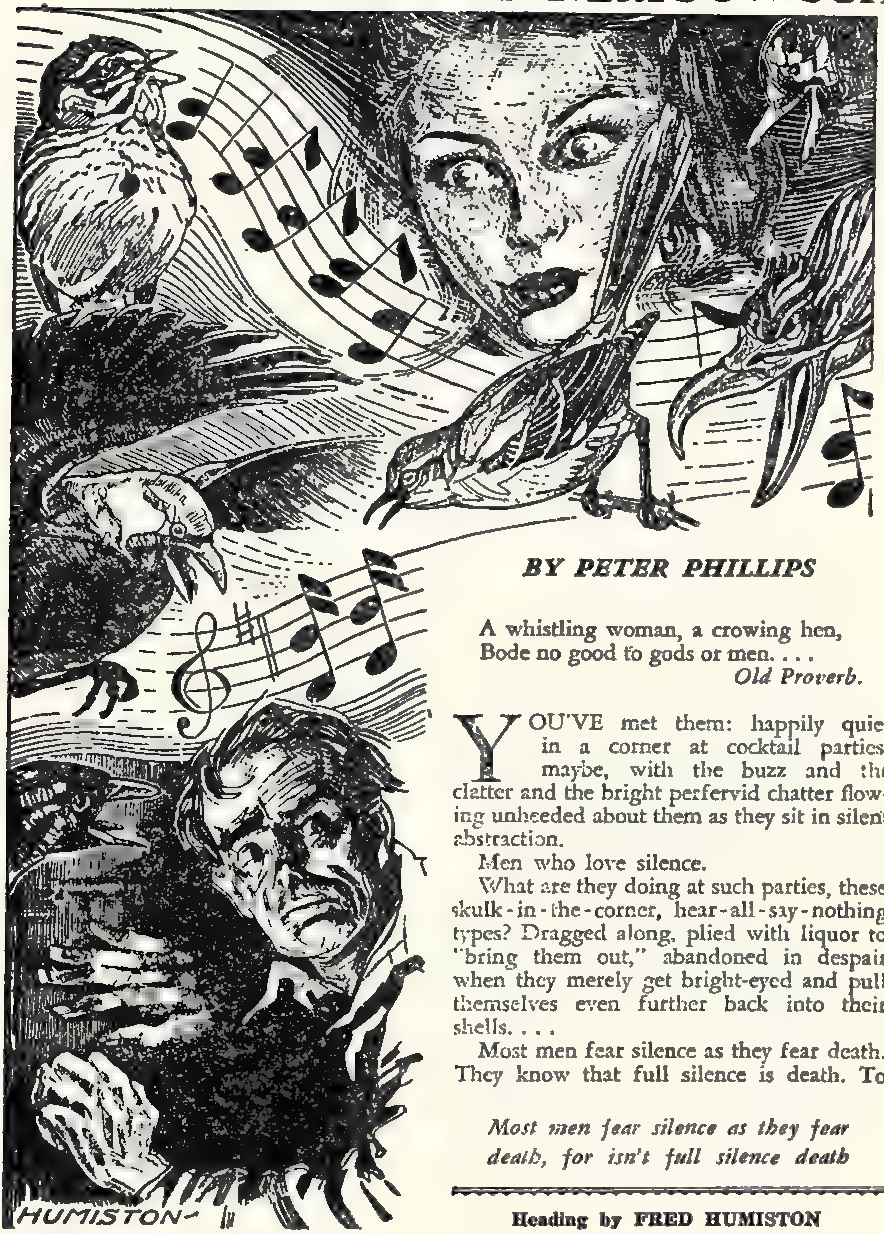
Lifting him up in readiness to draw the sheet over his face, it was the doctor who felt that peculiar lump in the pillow under the dead man's head. Assuming that the old fellow had hurriedly hidden his wallet there in his illness, as many travelers are wont to do, the physician ripped open the striped ticking and dug among the musty gray chicken-feathers with which the pillow was stuffed.

But what his hand brought out was not a wallet, but a large round ball of feathers, so compactly put together that a pin could scarcely pierce its center nor fumbling fingers tear it apart. Each feather overlaid its mate as neatly as though they had grown that way. . . . But they were not gray feathers like the rest of those in the hotel pillow.

They were white, pure white, like the feathers of a goose or a Leghorn pullet. Mr. Hapworthy would have recognized that particular ball of downy white, since he had unsuccessfully tried to purchase it for his collection as a curio. He would have understood how, miraculously, it had got in among the dirty Plymouth Rock feathers under his very irreligious head. He also would have understood *why*. . . .

And perhaps, lying there in death—quite chastened and amused and happy at being proven so wrong, by someone who had ignored his mind and looked into his heart—perhaps he did understand.

No Silence For Maloeween



BY PETER PHILLIPS

A whistling woman, a crowing hen,
Bode no good to gods or men. . . .
Old Proverb.

YOU'VE met them: happily quiet in a corner at cocktail parties, maybe, with the buzz and the clatter and the bright perfervid chatter flowing unheeded about them as they sit in silent abstraction.

Men who love silence.

What are they doing at such parties, these skulk-in-the-corner, hear-all-say-nothing types? Dragged along, plied with liquor to "bring them out," abandoned in despair when they merely get bright-eyed and pull themselves even further back into their shells. . . .

Most men fear silence as they fear death. They know that full silence is death. To

Most men fear silence as they fear death, for isn't full silence death

Heading by **FRED HUMISTON**

break it, they'll whistle in the dark, make music, talk.

In the final irony, they'll fire noisy guns to kill each other. If war were silent, they wouldn't make war. They need the courage of noise to brave the gates of the Great Silence. Brass trumpets, drums, war-cries.

But men like Gregor Maloeween, lovers of contemplation and the soft inwardness of difficult thoughts, cherish and seek silence. They don't fear it. That's why they don't fear death.

Mrs. Huldstrum grabbed a cocktail from a tray as it floated past in the hands of a cat-footed servant.

"I'd say it's a good thing they're getting married," she said, lifting the glass. "Anna will fetch him out of his shell."

Dian Matthieu looked back over a bare shoulder at Maloeween sitting quietly in a corner as usual.

"Do you think so?" she said with sweet malice. "Perhaps she'd prefer him to stay right inside his shell, where he won't see so much."

* * *

Anna Huygens had flirted her way around the whole university before she finally decided to settle down with Maloeween, reserved, brilliant professor of Astrophysics.

She wanted to vie with her mother as hostess in the small but socially cosmopolitan town where some of the finest brains in Europe were gathered to work and teach.

She was spry, beautiful, twenty-five—to Maloeween's forty— and the daughter of Alfred Huygens, ex-burgomaster, who owned a radio factory in the modern outskirts of the ancient town, and whose benefactions helped to keep the university going.

If she had been Maloeween's choice, it would have been a bad choice. But self-willed Anna did the choosing.

She wanted a solid, safe background to her social plans. Maloeween would provide it—big, thick-haired, heavy-browed, good-natured Maloeween, holder of an important Chair, popular in his own quiet way, and sufficiently tractable and absent-minded to leave all domestic and social arrangements to her.

And too preoccupied with the great abstractions of his science to notice—or care—whether she carried on with a few minor flirtations or not.

* * *

THIS was the engagement party. And Anna was about to embark on her party-piece.

Vivacious, corn-haired Anna was possessed of—some said possessed by—a social accomplishment of a rather unusual nature. The gift would have been remarkable in a man. In a woman, it was trebly so.

It was the ability to whistle, to mimic the songs of various birds with amazing fidelity, and so to harmonize these thin, delicate strains of indeterminate melody with the notes of an accompanying piano that, with eyes closed, it wasn't difficult to visualize a bird-musician—thrush, blackbird or nightingale—perched on the shoulder of the pianist, intently following the printed music with bright eyes, yet not relinquishing in any degree the distinctive character of its natural song.

She stood now, whistling *Clair de Lune*. Maloeween forgot for a moment the problem in astrophysics that had been engaging his mind most of the evening.

He was intrigued by the variety of trills, flutings, warblings, and whistlings that emerged from her deliciously pursed and pouting mouth; by her taut, indrawn cheeks, lightly flushed with effort; by the throb of a tiny pulse in her throat as she fluttered tongue against palate; by the tightening of her delicate nostrils as she drew fresh breath; by the far-away look of vacuous ecstasy in her blue eyes.

Her *piece-de-resistance* was the nightingale, that songster acclaimed above all others in Europe.

Maloeween was quite happy at the thought of marrying this gay, pretty, talented creature.

"Charming," he said, as he joined in the applause.

* * *

He didn't realize the full, dreadful truth until after a short while after their marriage.

The truth that Anna was incurably damned noisy.

She was, to begin with, a chatterer and gossip of considerable vehemence and stridency. Her voice could always be heard at

a distance above the high, shrill vociferations of a group of young people.

She was naturally noisy and obstreperous —yet not ungraceful—in all her movements. Although she was a slight person, with no trace of her mother's dumpiness, she walked on her heels, and her footsteps, particularly if she were on an upper floor, would reverberate throughout the house.

She would move things with loud assertiveness. She'd even been known to crack a saucer by the force with which she replaced an empty coffee-cup.

Even when she condescended to knit—a normally quiet occupation that she despised —she contrived to ply her needles with such taut-fingered vigor that their clicking filled the room.

She enjoyed the constant background of sound produced by the radio, whether it was of music or speech. Her inexpert tuning would elicit a cacophony of eldritch shrieks and indelicate eructations of noise.

And at all times, she would open her sweet mouth in song, or practise to perfect her whistling.

As a child—an only child—she had cried and stamped to gain the attention of a doting, weak-willed nurse. To her parents, she had ever been a mere noisy brat, who would have benefited from a swift smack in the right place.

Now they were inured to it, her noisiness was no more to them than a natural accompaniment of exuberance and high spirits.

But in fact she was still essentially a noisy brat, afraid to be silent for long in case the world should forget her existence.

Why didn't Maloeween observe these things, draw back, renege on the engagement while there was still time? Simply because there was no reason sufficiently apparent to him why he should fight against the forces of society, expediency and love—for he was quite enamoured of his flighty songbird—that were driving him towards marriage.

He had other things to think about.

And with the optimistic detachment that pure scientists assume towards such mundane matters, it's probable that he hoped she would adopt a more becoming sobriety of demeanor after marriage.

In any case, Anna, dispassionately aware of her own failing, toned down her noisy exuberance during the engagement period.

* * *

During the honeymoon, Maloeween delighted Anna by making a great effort to overcome his normal reserve and behave in an extrovert manner. He even devised, on the spot, a mathematical system that nearly broke the bank at the casino in the Belgian coastal resort where they stayed.

He proved himself a quietly competent lover (with scientific thoroughness he had read a work on the technique of love-making loaned to him—as a joke—by a professor of psychology).

And he laughed at and permitted himself to be drawn into the noisy frivolings of his bride.

This is to make something quite clear: that Maloeween was a man, not an eremitic, intolerant savant.

* * *

BUT the honeymoon had to end, and they returned to their new home, a pseudo-Gothic monstrosity near the main university building—a wedding gift of Papa Huygens.

Then the trouble started. Even if the egregious Anna hadn't assumed, because of his behavior during the honeymoon, that Maloeween, under her influence, had discarded his quietness and reserve, she would have been noisy. It was part of her brash nature.

But believing that he had changed, she became more noisily self-assertive than ever.

She banged, she thumped, she shouted to the maid, she strode on her heels, she sang, she whistled.

At first his reproofs were mild, ineffective. "Please, Anna," he'd say. "I find it a little difficult to concentrate when you walk about so heavily and whistle quite so loudly."

"Silly boy," she'd say. "I must move about. And all my family walk on their heels. But you love my whistling, don't you? Hear—the nightingale!"

And she would pucker her rose-red lips and trill a cadenza.

His reproofs became less mild. But equally ineffective.

"Really, Anna, I must have a little quiet

when I'm in my study. I'm engaged on a very intricate calculation, and I've a lecture to prepare. Your whistle is so damned penetrating. And, by the way, I wish you'd turn off the radio when it's obvious you're not listening."

"All right." She'd swirl her corn-colored locks. "But do get your silly sums finished. There are some people coming this evening."

"Another party?" he sighed.

"Just a few friends. Sure you don't mind?"

He shrugged. Anna's parties were, of course, noisy. She insisted on dancing and musical games, even after formal dinners. Her personality was sufficiently strong to impose her own forms of amusement on guests. On one occasion she inveigled a silver-haired pedant of 77—Otto Schreimann, the Vienna neurologist—to indulge in her version of a Cherokee war-dance.

Indulging to the full her long-repressed desire to exhibit prowess as a hostess, her dinners and parties were frequent.

And she would not suffer Maloeween to remain away from them, in the quiet of his laboratory.

She'd seek him out there—it was a short distance from the house—and say: "You must come along, Gregor. Your guests have arrived."

"But my dear Anna, they're your guests. And in any case, if you had permitted me to work in my study this afternoon, it wouldn't have been necessary for me to come here this evening."

"But I didn't disturb you . . . ?"

"Your whistling—"

"I was practicing, Gregor. You wouldn't call that a *noise*? Listen—a blackbird!"

And, with unexpressed resignation, he would return to the house.

Anna's personality, always marked, flourished and grew strong in exertion against Maloeween, the man of peace.

He wasn't dominated by her. His own will was too strong. But he became, in a sense, subdued, as a nation which offers only passive resistance might be subdued by an enemy.

Rather than assert any measure of authority when she was in a particularly noisy mood, he'd retire to his study or laboratory or even, at night, stroll around the deserted lecture-rooms and halls of the main university building.

But Anna wilfully misconstrued his desire and need for peace and silence as mere lack of concern for her and a wish to escape. And, lacking severe rebuke, she'd force herself upon his attention in the same way she had forced herself upon the attention of her doting nurse.

She was, in short, jealous of his work.

With his stolid Slav-Netherlands blood, he was not of a nervous temperament. But in the mental conflict between his desire for peace and his disinclination to fight for it, his nerves suffered.

THEIR derangement took the most vicious form possible in the circumstances: his auditory nerves were affected and he became hypersensitive to sound, not only to volume—he could hear the ticking of a small clock at fifty feet—but to tonal quality, so that harsh voices irritated him, and the dissonances in contemporary and jazz music were almost unbearable.

Anna was fond of such music.

Sounds were conveyed in such degree and quality to his brain that their impress became retroactive, and he would "hear" them again long after they had ceased. A musician will say that he can "hear" music in all its orchestral complexity when reading a familiar score.

In the same way, Maloeween would "hear" all the noises incidental to a set period of activity, recorded by his brain with detailed fidelity and in correct sequence.

After one of Anna's parties, while on the verge of restless sleep, he would hear again, dimly but distinctly, the greetings, the clamorous gossip, the shuffle and beat of feet to a blaring swing band, the noisy games, the loud and lengthy farewells.

And all interspersed with Anna's mimicry of bird-song.

When this first happened, he sat up in bed and cried: "Anna! Your damned friends have drifted back. Haven't they any respect for privacy and peace? Get them out of here before I bounce them out on their necks!"

If, in fact, they had returned and Maloeween had forced himself out of his pas-

sivity to deal with them, Anna might have learned a lesson. And she might still be alive.

But you can't get tough with noises in the head.

Anna said: "You've been dreaming, Gregor."

"But listen—"

"Nonsense, silly boy. You probably heard a party of drunks outside in the street. It's silent now, anyway."

But there was no silence for Maloeween.

Whether the noises he heard were purely subjective, or a neurological phenomenon, is a question for experts.

Rationalists might say that all the noises from first to last, before and after Anna's death, had a mental or nervous origin.

They would also say that Gregor Maloeween murdered Anna. But he was a reasonable and reasoning man. Even in the final extremity, when exhortations had failed, when a private appeal for the intervention of her parents had met with amused deprecation, would he not have considered separation, desertion, divorce, or even slapping the hell out of the fool girl, rather than murder.

Unfortunately, Anna believed that he had murdered her.

And she expressed her conviction of this in such a manner that Maloeween himself, despite the strivings of his reason, came to fear that he had done so, that a sternly-suppressed wish to silence her had contrived to express itself in action.

He remembered that, as he handed her the sleeping-draught, his mind had been invaded by a sudden terrible hope that she would sleep and be silent forever.

His hand had shaken with the very effort to disavow the uninvited thought.

At the inquest, he said: "The drug was originally prescribed for me, as I was sleeping badly, and compounded in fair but unspecified quantity at the university pharmaceutical laboratory. I'd taken larger doses myself, with no bad effects. When my wife asked me to make up the draught for her, I told her 'You shouldn't need such things, Anna. I shan't make it very strong.'

"I can only conclude that, in my momentary absence, thinking that I had made it too weak, she increased the dose."

THAT, with details, is what he said. How could he say: "I may have given her a lethal dose. It wasn't my conscious intention to do so, but a wish may have been father to the deed . . . ?"

The equivalent of an open verdict was given by the coroner.

The inquest was held in a police office that faced the Old Square of the university town, a secluded, paved expanse bordered by ancient buildings and centuries-old elm trees.

After the inquiry, Maloeween stepped out alone into the wintry sunshine.

Behind him, in the corridor outside the police office, small groups of whispering people had gathered.

He felt the pressure of their whisperings and glances against his back. Mr. and Mrs. Huygens, his in-laws, held back so that they would not have to accompany him.

As Maloeween, a dark, big-headed figure, feeling empty and strangely alone, paced slowly across the Old Square towards his non-silent home, he heard the singing of a bird.

The soft, sweet, insistent, unmistakable trilling of a nightingale, clear and high through the noon-time hush of the Old Square.

Maloeween looked up, his great brow furrowed, turning his head from side to side to locate the sound.

But it came not from one direction, nor from many directions, but from no direction. Limbo has no direction.

And nightingales don't sing in winter.

Anna was not satisfied with the inquest verdict; and her miserable soul had not found silence.

Maloeween stopped, pressed his hands to his ears. But the keen, thrilling sound—a joy, if it was not a mockery and a torture—could not be stifled that way.

He hurried on. And as the noise of his footsteps increased, the singing became faint, a mere wraith of song, and when he reached and walked amid the traffic and noise of the High Street, it stopped abruptly.

His breathing was quick, his thoughts wild, unsteady: "I need a sedative. . . . The inquest upset me. . . . It's just a repetition in my brain of a sound that has ceased. . . .

I must work, work hard, lecture, write, give myself no time for crazy fancies . . . subjective, purely subjective . . . when I walk, make noise, occupy myself, the singing goes . . . it's simply a slight derangement, and work is the cure. . . ."

He was partly right. Work was the cure. So long as it involved noise.

When he was lecturing, talking, listening to conversation or music or using the old and clattering typewriter in his study, the song of the nightingale faded away.

Because subtle and wicked Anna, uneasy in Limbo, had conceived this fiendish irony—that Maloeween, lover of silence, should be compelled to seek the distraction of noise in order to still the demonic song of the nightingale.

SHE conserved her etheric energy for those times when silence was imposed on Maloeween, by night and the approach to sleep.

Even sleep itself, deep, drug-induced sleep, was not peace, for Limbo knows no barriers.

And in fitful vivid dreams Maloeween not only heard the song but saw, malicious yet beautiful, the face of Anna, red lips puckered, taut cheeks lightly flushed with the effort of whistling, her blue eyes wide —not vague, as they were in life when she practiced her mimicry, but ecstatic, exultant, staring at him.

From such a nightmare he would awake, forcing his eyes to open, his limbs to move; and, heavy with lethargy and deadening but useless drugs, he would go to the radio and tune in any station that might still be on the air.

The unholy bird-song would then stop for a while.

Once, at midnight, with the shrill song keening through his brain, seeming to set the very threads of his nerves trembling to its vibrations, he dressed and went out into the cold night.

He walked quickly through the sleeping town, his frantic footsteps clattering through the deserted, narrow streets, sounding metallic and hollow along cobblestoned alleyways, echoing from blank, indifferent walls.

Exhausted, he stopped and leaned against a shop window. But as a hush closed in on the dark street, a chill wind fluttering down from the roof-tops brought the song of the nightingale, infinitely mocking, from the depths beyond the earth.

Maloeween, his eyes filled with tears of exquisite pain, looked at the pale stars. Helpless rage welled up in him. He stamped and beat his feet on the sidewalk in a mad tattoo, a fierce, puppet-like, jerking dance that bruised his heels and jarred his bones.

And he shouted aloud in a voice of sudden dreadful power: "Silence! Silence! Silence!"

When the sound of his crazy, petulant jig—like the monstrous tantrums of a lunatic child—had died away, there was silence for a moment.

He listened, heart thumping, one hand to his neck, the other blindly thrust out as if to ward off a blow.

A helmeted policeman, who had heard his shouts, strolled out of an alleyway nearby, saw him standing there, a tall, heavy figure in a black cloak.

In the pale, unfriendly light of a single street lamp—gas was still used for illumination in the ancient center of the university town—Maloeween's big face was white, his eyes black polka-dots staring in horror.

The policeman came up softly, touched his shoulder, said kindly: "You look sick, sir. Anything I can do?"

Maloeween grasped his arm fiercely. "Listen."

"I don't hear a thing."

"Faintly, far away, coming closer—a nightingale. You must hear it!"

The policeman said: "Nightingales don't sing in winter."

Maloeween turned to him, lips sliding back over teeth in a fearsome grin. "This one does. Winter, summer, night and day, dawn, noon and sunset, sleeping and waking. No silence for you it says, tweet-tweet, chirrup-chirrup, make noise, tweet-tweet, talk, chirrup-chirrup, sing, dance, bang, thump like she used to do, tweet-tweet, and then I'll stop, then you won't hear my beautiful song, the song of the damned. . . . Hear my sweet song, says the beauty in hell, trilling away with her lovely lips. Listen, she says, listen—the nightingale—

you love the nightingale, don't you? Tiny brown bird with the wonderful voice, tiny brown demon with the voice of purgatory!"

"Come along, sir. You'll wake the street up, shouting like that. There are people sleeping in these houses."

The madness went out of Maloeween's eyes.

"Sleep?" he said. "Do you know how long a man can go without sleep? Not long. He just dies. He can go longer without food than without sleep. Death is not sleep. Death is silence, except in hell. That's where that nightingale is—in hell. But I don't want to die. I don't deserve to. She's trying to kill me, to make me kill myself. I won't."

He released the policeman's arm. "Is there an all-night cafe, a dirty place, a noisy place, where I can get a drink?"

"Not in this part of the town."

"Wherever it is, take me there, officer." Maloeween pulled out a note-case.

The policeman frowned, then shrugged and took the money. The big fellow didn't look like a drunk. . . . Well-dressed, respectable—a university professor, maybe. Well, if he wanted a drink, it was a policeman's job to know all the all-night bistros. . . .

Maloeween said: "Please talk, officer, as we walk along. Tell me about yourself, your job, your family, where you live."

* * *

THE cafe was dirty, but quiet.

Two or three students on a jag who had drifted in from the regular places after they closed, railwaymen from the nearby yards who hurried in from duty to snatch a quick cognac, lorry-drivers, a couple of apache *types*, three weary, cheap-scented prostitutes. . . .

One of the women came over, helped Maloeween finish a bottle of pernod. She talked brightly for a while, then gradually relapsed into drunken silence.

Tears of self-pity welled from Maloeween's red-rimmed eyes.

He sobbed, banged the table with his glass. "Talk up," he shouted to the faces that seemed to loom around him in the smoke-hazed gloom. "Sing, play. . . . Make more noise, can't you? Is this a graveyard?"

Later, when the unaccustomed liquor took its effect, he slumped over the table, head on outflung arm, and slept, mouth loosely open, snoring.

He awoke to the stale smells of the bistro at dawn, slouched out into the chill half-light of the streets.

The sweet song of a nightingale floated on the still air of the new day, to greet him.

He went back to the cafe the next night, repeated the performance.

Then, every night. Until students muttered about his rapidly-worsening appearance, his haggard face, his untidy clothes.

The university authorities said: "Overwork. You need a rest."

Maloeween said: "No. Work is the cure. I cannot work enough."

But he tried to break the habit of going to the bistro and drinking himself into a stupor. One night he stayed at home and listened to the music of Mozart—the Magic Flute.

But it seemed that Anna was still able to harmonize, for the sound of the flute faded, and its place in the orchestration was taken by the thin warbling of a nightingale, improvising perfectly in rhythm and counterpoint, yet retaining its characteristics as bird-song.

Maloeween switched off the radio and went upstairs to the bathroom. The nightingale sang on.

He took up his old open razor, brought the edge to his throat, his hand shaking with infinite weariness. . . . And the warbling of the bird stopped abruptly.

Anna did not want him to die. Not that way.

* * *

Maloeween consulted a former colleague at another European university, an alienist of international repute, who told him: "I can't help you. I suggest you see a priest. Or, perhaps, a student of the occult."

* * *

Maloeween saw an occultist, an old creature wise in evil, who received him in a darkened room, and said: "Tell me nothing of yourself yet. Let me listen for a while to your presence."

Then, after a few moments, the old man said: "I can hear something, a sound that accompanies you. It is the song of a bird."

But he could do nothing for Maloeween.

Maloeween stood in a large, panelled room amid many accusing eyes. When asked to repeat his admission of guilt for the court records, he did not address the judge.

He looked up at the ceiling of the courtroom, and said: "Very well, I killed you. I admit it. Now go. Give me silence. Give me peace."

* * *

Maloeween stood beneath an open sky, on a wooden platform. The very air about him trembled with the triumphant song of a nightingale.

He stared at the bleak sky and cried: "Accursed woman! Accursed bird! You've got what you wanted. Surely you can't follow me now? Stop, in the name of God, stop!"

And he would have shaken his fist, but his hands were tied behind his back.

Then the air rushed about him; and the song of the nightingale ceased; and the gates of the Great Silence opened before him.

And even as he walked through them to an eternity of peace, Maloeween was grateful to the hangman who had just released the trapdoor beneath his feet.

The Eldritch One

By PAULINE BOOKER

I'VE lived for long, uncounted eons,
Since Time and I were young;
I dwell in hidden crypts and eyries,
And speak with witch's tongue.

When blood drips from the horned moon,
And wild winds lash the sea,
And men and ships die in the night,
I laugh with demon-glee.

For well I know my evil curse—
That I shall never die;
My soul will dwell in snakes and toads,
And bats that blindly fly.

I walk my dark, forbidden ways,
And none of human race
Can ever flee my awful spell,
Who look upon my face.

And when the sun at last grows cold
In its vain, ageless quest,
I'll seek once more the alien land
Where I was born unblest.

One Foot in the Grave

You don't think of your feet much—until you lose one.
Then maybe it thinks of you!

IT WAS all over. And now Henry was lying, comfortable and easy, between the cool sheets in the room off Doc Sandy's office. It was really amazing. There was scarcely any pain to it at all. As a matter of fact, Henry, staring at the pale, yellow ceiling of the bedroom in the doctor's house, felt actually more rested and quiet than he

BY DAVE GRUBB

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

had felt in years. He smiled. All those months of talking safety to his men in the saw-mill—it was ironic. And then it came to him: how it had happened—his walking through the big, pine-fragrant lumber room with Ed Smiley, his foreman—his foot catching suddenly in a crack—the sudden, wild fear as he pitched forward headlong toward the great, whirring blade of the rip-saw—Ed's big hands grabbing his shoulder, throwing him, saving his life. Then the numbness in his foot and the sickness and that was all there was to it until now: Henry lying comfortably and quietly between the sheets.

Doc Sandy's face between him and the ceiling now.

How's it feel, Henry?

I'm all right, he could hear his voice saying, far away. I'm really all right. But you know something. John? It's a funny thing—I really can't understand how it could be.

What's that, Henry?

My foot, he said. The one that's gone. I can't understand how it could be. It—itches.

And it sounded so ridiculous that he laughed in spite of himself.

It not only itches, he said. But it feels cold. Especially the big toe.

THAT'S not strange, said Doc Sandy. That often happens, Henry. You see—the foot's still there in a way. And in a way it isn't. The part that's still there is in your brain. Or in your soul—it's a hard thing to explain—

Henry shut his eyes then and began to shake weakly with laughter.

What's funny, Henry?

I win that bet, John, Henry said. It's a technicality, I'll admit, but I win it. You can't deny that.

And he could hear Doc Sandy laughing and cursing and saying yes Henry was right, he had won the bet, and Henry shut his eyes, remembering the night the bet was made—the cold winter night—Henry and Doc Sandy playing three-cushion billiards in the Recreation Pool Room and drinking beer and talking about death. Doc Sandy had bet Henry that he would be under the ground before Henry would and Henry had bet him that it would be the other way around and they put down their cues and shook hands on it and agreed that whoever survived was to pay for the other one's funeral.

Yes, Henry kept saying. I win. I win by a foot, John. And I intend to see you give that foot the best funeral that money can buy.

Then the doctor's nurse was giving him a drink; the glass straw was between his lips and the good, cool water was soothing to his parched throat. He could hear Doc Sandy lighting his old pipe and then he could smell the sweet, dry fragrance of the burning tobacco.

John, he said.

Yes, Henry.

John, I keep wondering a funny thing. I keep wondering which—which place my foot went to. It was part of me—so it must be part of my soul. It's a funny thing to wonder but I just can't help it. I mean—when the rest of me goes over—will my foot be waiting there to join me again? John, it gives you the funniest feeling in the world to think of a foot—a single, solitary foot wandering around eternity—waiting— I can't help wondering where it's gone and where it's waiting—in the Good Place or—

Henry shut his eyes and began to laugh again.

What's funny, Henry?

My foot! Henry laughed. I swear it, John. When I said that a second ago—when I said I wondered where it had gone—so help me, John!—it felt hot!

Nobody could have been nicer to Henry than his secretary Margeret and his foreman Ed Smiley were those next couple of weeks. Henry stayed on the cot at Doc Sandy's office until he was able to get around on crutches and there wasn't a single night that Ed and Margeret missed coming to see him and almost always they brought something—ice cream from Beam's Confectionery or maybe a big spray of sweet shrubs from Judge Bruce's backyard.

MARGERET was a queer little person in her early thirties—blond and pretty in a way that nobody ever noticed particularly—living alone in the Bruce's boarding house on Lafayette Avenue—going to the movies every Saturday night with Ed Smiley and then afterwards having an ice-cream soda with him at Beam's. Henry, like many bach-

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elors, often fancied himself quite a matchmaker and he was fond of reflecting that, had it not been for him, Ed and Margeret would never have met. He was continually asking the girl when she was going to get married and Margeret, at this, would blush warmly and busy herself in the papers on the desk. Henry never teased Ed about it—knowing, as a man, that Ed had his own good reasons for waiting. But it was something he thought about a lot during those two weeks in bed. And it was a pleasant relief—to think about this—nights when his foot would not let him sleep—nights when the plagued, absent thing felt so cold that he could have sworn that it wandered alone among the mountains of the moon—nights when the rain hurled itself against the windows of the doctor's house and Henry, shivering in the warm cot off the doctor's office, could feel the cold, dreadful wet of the March night between his toes. One night he could stand it no longer. It was late—past midnight—and Doc Sandy had gone to bed long hours before. Just the same Henry had to know.

He had to talk. He called for a long time before he heard the doctor's slippers whispering down the kitchen stairs.

John, he said. I know it's silly. You'll swear I've gone loco or something—

Want a sleeping pill, Henry?

No, he said. It's not that, John. I swear you'll think I've gone loco—

What, Henry?

It's just this, Henry said. I've got to know for sure. Did you bury it, John? I know it was just a joke at first and we kidded about the bet and all that and you said you'd had a little coffin made and buried the fool thing in back of the saw-mill under the puzzle-tree. You think I'm loco but—

I did bury it, Henry, said the doctor. I swear I did.

You swear it?

I swear it, said the doctor. Look here, Henry. Get a grip on yourself! You're going to be up and around in a day or so—on crutches for a while—then we'll get you a foot that'll be as good as new! You'll never miss it!

Henry shut his eyes and pressed the back of his head hard into the pillow. His hands were wet with perspiration.

It's funny you're saying that, John. It's very funny.

What's funny, Henry?

That I'll never miss it. It's very funny—your putting it like that. It's what's been going through my head all night. The feeling that—that somehow—*it* misses *me*.

There wasn't much trick to the crutches after a few days. It was a little hard getting the knack of them at first but, within a week, Henry was getting around almost as easily as before. And within two weeks he was able to get up and downstairs to his room over the mill office without any help at all. In a month the place was healed enough so that Doc Sandy was able to fix him up with an artificial foot. Henry felt a little better about it and began to get his sleep at night now that he knew the doctor had really buried the thing. Then one day he began to worry again and asked the doc-

tor to take him down back of the saw-mill and show him the little grave.

You're the damndest fool I ever did see, Henry! Doc Sandy said, laughing. Getting all upset over a fool joke.

Did you put a shoe on it? Henry said, staring solemnly at the little mound under the puzzle tree.

Certainly, said the doctor. And a brand-new shoe at that—the pair you bought at Jim Purdy's sale the week before the accident. Never been worn.

Is there a sock on it, too? whispered Henry.

Damn it all, man—!

Is there? he said.

Yes! cried the doctor. Yes, damn it, there's a sock on it!

You didn't put it on straight, Henry said, shaking his head a little sorrowfully. You put it on crooked, John. It pinches my toe!

THAT night it began. Night was the time when it always happened. Henry would go to bed, knowing that he was perfectly sane, knowing that the thing could not be true. Yet it was true. It was happening. It was as real as life itself. Sometimes it would be just a pressure on the sole—as if he were standing somewhere, waiting for a train perhaps. And then it would begin—the gentle, pulsing padding—the lift and fall of walking—the easy thud of brick pavement beneath the foot—the soft crush of leaves or grass. And Henry would lie quaking and sweating beneath the quilt and stare with wild sorrow and horror into the shuddering dark. The foot—his foot—apart from him—was walking somewhere—going some place—living its own life without any help from him. Then he made another discovery that seemed more incredible and awful than any of the rest of it. It was that the foot always seemed to be going the same distance—walking along the same ways—the same street. Henry got so that he could count the number of steps on the brick pavement and then, after a pause, steps soft and yielding beneath the heel, then another pause and something different again—wooden floor perhaps—then the slower, measured climbing of a stairway.

One night after it had stopped Henry

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sprang from his bed in a frenzy of fear. Snatching his clothes from the back of the chair by his bed he dressed quickly, lighted the oil lamp and went out back to the puzzle tree. Fetching a shovel from the toolshed behind the saw-mill he began to dig. When the spade scraped on the wooden box Henry's heart flew to his mouth. Digging, clawing with his hands, panting and perspiring like a man in a fever, he dragged the little box into the lantern light, pried off the lid with the tip of the spade and stared within. For a moment he was sure he had lost his mind. He lifted it out and looked closely to be sure. The sole. The sole of the brand-new shoe from Jim Purdy's store. He remembered the day he had bought those shoes. He had never worn them. But the sole. It was scuffed and scratched. Worn.

They were shooting pool that afternoon in the Recreation—Henry and Doc Sandy.

Henry, said the doctor, chalking his cue-stick and squinting low along the cushions for a massé shot. Ed Smiley was in to see me this morning.

Ed? said Henry. Doesn't look like there's anything wrong with him. He's the perfect picture of health!

Doc Sandy shot and missed.

It wasn't about himself that he came to see me, Henry, he said. It was about Margeret. Your Margeret. She's not well, Henry. I'll tell you frankly—I prescribed a couple of weeks' vacation. She's run down—nervous. Ed said he didn't want to ask you and you know Margeret. She'd never ask you.

I hadn't noticed her, Henry said. I really never pay any attention to her, John. You know how it is. You just take somebody like Margeret for granted—year after year. Sure! Sure, I'll give her two weeks off—a month if she needs it! Thanks for telling me, John.

SUPPERTIME. Walking home down Lafayette Avenue. Poor little Margeret. Henry felt like a slave-driver. Never realizing what a drab little world it must have been for her all those years—day after day in that glum, dingy office, laboring over the books in that proper, lace-like little hand of her's, keeping his office neat and dusted. When Henry opened the office door he heard her. She was crying. Then he saw

her: slumped among the papers on the desk, her hands over her face, her shoulders shaking with sobs.

Henry stood there wondering what to do; feeling terrible about it. He cleared his throat.

Margeret, he said. Margeret.

She stood up slowly and turned, facing him. Her face was streaked and wet with tears—plainer and more homely than he had ever seen her—the face under the washed blond hair tired and old.

Don't touch me, she whispered. She was shuddering violently and clutching her handkerchief into a tight wet ball. Don't come near me! Let me alone! Oh, when will you let me alone!

Henry felt behind him for a chair and sat down with a thump.

I—I don't understand, he began. What do you mean, Margeret? Let you alone—

What do I mean! she whispered. What do I mean! You ask me that! You dare to ask me that!

I—I don't— I don't understand, he said. He reached in the pocket of his alpaca coat for a handkerchief to mop the perspiration from his upper lip.

She seemed almost crouching; ready to spring on him.

Last night, she whispered fiercely, the knuckles of her thin, red hands shining white with rage. Last night!—the night before last! How many nights! Lying there listening for your footsteps on the pavements—the creaking of the gate—your footsteps on the tan-bark walk—then lying there waiting for your footstep on the stairs. Those nights! My God! The things you told me—the things you promised me! You said we'd be married! You said—you said you'd kill me if you ever lost me! You ask me what I mean! Those nights! In my room! In my arms!

She sprang forward and struck him across the face with the flat of her hand. Henry didn't feel the blow. He sat staring through the girl—beyond her.

My—footsteps? he whispered.

She was on the floor now, at his feet, covering his hands with kisses.

I'm sorry, she wailed. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that! Oh, I didn't. For-

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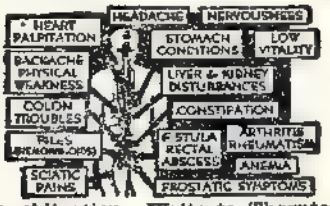

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give me, dearest! It's just that—I couldn't stand it! I couldn't! At first—the first night—I thought it was a dream when I heard your footsteps and then the door opened and I saw it was you— It was like seeing a ghost. I couldn't believe it. Those nights—they've seemed like a dream—unreal, wonderful!

My footsteps? he whispered again, rising, pushing her away from him, stepping over her sobbing, shaking shoulders and walking like a sleeper out the door and up the steps to his room. He lay down with his clothes on and stared unseeing at the ceiling, moving over the yellow, guttering light of the gas flame by the bedroom door.

A soul within him—a hidden, secret other him—a tenant of his heart that the foot had claimed its own and taken with it to the grave! Margeret. He had never so much as looked at her. He had never seen her. She was a piece of furniture. A desk. A chair. A ledger with the lacy, sorrowful love letter of commerce on its pages.

My footstep, he said aloud to the walls.

Footsteps. Down the pavement of the shady street in the secret moment of the night—footsteps up the tanbark walk of the Bruce's boarding house—footsteps up the stairs—the hesitation and then the open door.

Then he was hearing her flat, tired voice—still and composed now. He turned his head on the pillow. She was standing in the bedroom door—looking at him. She had on her cheap little flowered hat and the coat with the touching curl of dusty fur about the collar.

I'm sorry to bother you again, she said. I won't bother you any more. You won't ever have to bother with me again. The books are in order. I'm leaving town with Ed Smiley tonight. He's going to marry me.

THEN she was gone. Henry listened to her quick footsteps going down the stairs. The street door slammed and the clock in the town hall struck six times. He lay back—sad, regretful but at the same time relieved. It was all over now. Perhaps tonight he could sleep. Sleep! That El Dorado of peace that he had long ceased hoping for. Henry shut his eyes. He had stopped trembling. It was dark outside the

window—the heavy wine dark of early April. Then in a moment it began again.

Footsteps. The foot. Fast now. Faster than it had ever been. Along the damp pavements of the small-town night. Running. The thud was almost painful on his sole. Then a pause. Then the running again—up the springy, yielding softness of tanbark—under the trees bursting with dark greenness in the moonless April night. Up the wooden steps—two—four—six—eight. Henry shut his eyes and clenched his teeth against the scream that struggled in his throat. Ten—twelve— The landing now. Up the hall—His fingers tore through the linen sheet beneath him. The door—the open door. He felt he was fainting—his eyes started from his head. Then it began—not on the sole now but on the toe—a smashing, violent rhythm on the toe of his foot—a remorseless, brutal thudding that made his leg ache to the very hip. Then it stopped. The padding, running thud again—down the steps—through the tanbark—through the dark—the mossy pavements of the April night—then, at last, like a benediction it was still.

He lay on the bed for a long while before getting up. Then he went slowly down the stairs, down the path to the shed, down to the puzzle tree with the spade in his shaking fingers. Like a madman he dug. His fingers ached and the nails broke as he clawed the box from the earth, ripped the wooden lid loose and stared at the thing within. He was standing there at dawn when Doc Sandy and the sheriff came down the path. Not moving. Just standing looking at the foot in his hand and the shoe—its toe all dark with something sticky and some wisps of washed blond hair.

READERS' VOTE

CITY OF LOST PEOPLE	THE GROTTO OF CHEER
NEMESIS	A DEATH CROWN FOR MR. HAPWORTHY
CLAY	NO SILENCE FOR MALOEWEEN
SAUNDER'S LITTLE FRIEND	ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE
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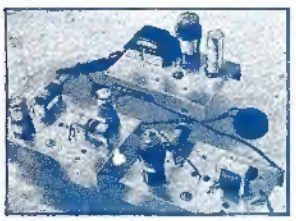

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